Hillsong's Colour Sisterhood and Feminism within the Context of South Africa:

A Critical Analysis

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DECLARATION

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Abstract

This thesis is a critical analysis of Hillsong's Colour Sisterhood movement and Colour Conference event in Cape Town during 2017. Following Shireen Hassim's argument for the recognition of non-political women's movements and organisations as forming part of the broader feminist movement in South Africa, I question whether the Colour Sisterhood can be seen as a site for the creation of nomadic feminist subjectivities, especially within the local context of South Africa. I explore the visual, narrative, spatial and performative as constituents of Hillsong's Colour Sisterhood movement across its various platforms, including online and social media, literature and the Colour Conference Cape Town 2017. I situate visual and narrative analysis within a sociological framework and I argue that the Colour Sisterhood movement fails to pursue the feminist notions of 'women's empowerment' and 'diversity' it so often articulates in its discourse.

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Introduction

Feminism in South Africa: Some Challenges

The 2017 Women's March in Washington, a grand mobilisation of an estimated 500, 000 women rallying together to decry the promises of newly-inaugurated American president Donald Trump (Buncombe 2017, Mccausland 2017), had brought feminism pivoting into, not only physical and virtual public spaces, but also public consciousness. The march, and the events leading up to it, seemed to have ruptured a general and pervasive silence and complacency on equal rights as not only full-time activists but also 'ordinary' women took to the streets in a bold gesture proclaiming that they would not be silenced (Buncombe 2017, Walters 2017). This message resonated beyond boundaries and the world participated eagerly through sister marches and online displays of unanimity. Locally, during the anti-Trump marches, Cape Town too saw an inter-cultural gathering of hundreds in solidarity, protest posters among others reading "woman's (sic) place is in the resistance" and "silence is not an option".[1]

But, for myself, these events evoked images of four brave women fearlessly upstaging the presidential address at the IEC conference just months earlier. Holding placards inciting remembrance of Khwezi, and demanding justice for all rape victims in South Africa, these women forced their bodies into history in a silent yet audacious act of defiance that would stir and further unsettle the murky waters of the Zuma presidency (Pather 2016).[2] One of the protestors, Naledi Chirwa, following her violent removal from the scene by presidential bodyguards, stated that: "Two days from now they will be screaming 'wa tinta abafazi wa tint'umbokoto' (you strike a woman; you strike a rock). But they watched us being tinta'd (struck) there. They watched us and in fact they threw stones at us and said we were not supposed to be there, so we deserved it" (in Genever 2016).[3] Days later four statues were unveiled commemorating the four leaders of the 1956 Women's March (Bendile 2016) on the Union Buildings in Pretoria, but it was the bodies of the four

[1] News 24. 2017. Cape Town Women Join in Anti-Trump Sister March [O]. Available: http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/cape-town-women-join-in-anti-trump-sister-march-20170121 [2017, March]

[2] Jacob Zuma stood trial and was acquitted for the rape of Khwezi in 2006. The protestors interrupted the president's speech by taking a silent stand in front of the podium holding placards that read "I am 1 in 3", "#", "10 years later", "Khanga" and "Remember Khwezi" (Pather 2006).

[3] What Chirwa referred to was the upcoming National Women's Day march which would commemorate how 20 000 South African women of all races marched together in 1956 in protest of the pass laws (see Walker 1982: 194-197). The 'optimistically militant' slogan "you have tampered with a woman, you have struck a rock" had served to spur on the marchers during this historical event (Walker 1982: 189).

young women intervening at the IEC conference that, at that moment, triumphed as monuments against injustice. Yet the isolation of their lonely demonstration was also, for myself, symbolic of the isolation of women in their struggles within our country…a metaphor for the condition of being either 'absent' or 'throwing stones' when it came to the struggles of ordinary South African women.

In an article entitled "Why South Africa Needs a Strong Feminist Movement to Fight Patriarchy", Tsoaledi Thobejane writes of South Africa that "21 years after liberation…Patriarchy remains deeply entrenched" and that "incidents of rape and domestic violence remain stubbornly high" (2015). The persistent realities of poverty, unemployment and discrimination continue to underscore women's struggles in South Africa (Segalo 2015). South African feminism faces issues such as continual entanglement with the aftermath of colonialism and apartheid: the racial fissures created by the historical racial-exclusivity of national citizenship (Manicom 2005: 28), for example, continue to play a role. Other pertinent issues, to name but a few, are those surrounding black women's oppression under patriarchal customary or 'traditional' law, (2005:35), the differences in the regulations as well as discursive constructs of subjects according to race, class and sexuality (2005: 37), and the continuation of the traditional 'silencing' of women, and specifically black women (Segalo 2015). Desiree Lewis notes how "violent attacks on women's bodily security" within South Africa are upheld through the "ethos of masculinist postcolonial nation-building" (Lewis 2008: 7). She states that "women's independence, whether in the form of their sexual autonomy or their economic independence, is ruthlessly disciplined" (*ibid.*).[4]

The challenge is often how to move beyond the rhetoric of women's rights as being purely "gestural" to those women lacking prospects and representation (Manicom 2005: 35). Shireen Hassim writes that "formal institutions of liberal democracies have failed women" (Hassim 2005: 10). On the one hand, post-apartheid state politics have made leaps through an inclusionary feminist politics in allowing women access to public power, however, there remains a reluctance "to tamper with the structural basis of inequality" (Hassim 2005: 11). While the "state machinery" has accumulated 'gender' as a nationalist "technocratic process for redress and equality" (Lewis 2008:4), it has

[4] Bell hooks offers a clear and straight forward definition for 'feminism' in *Feminism is for Everybody*, namely: "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression' (2000:1). Along with the awareness that feminist theory continues to be "a theory in the making" (hooks 1984: 10), I believe feminism ought to be defined, as called for by Braidotti, in terms of 'transformative or affirmative ethics' (2008b: 3). This viewpoint, rather than situating feminism as yet another 'regulatory sovereign power' emphasises productive, dynamic and creative 'becomings' (Braidotti 2008b). This means, as Ahmed (2017) suggests, that the feminist movement is precisely that—a 'movement'. Via Ahmed I would therefore like to suggest that feminism is firstly about: "asking questions about how to live better in an unjust and unequal world…how to find ways to support those who are not supported or are less supported by social systems; how to keep coming up against histories that have become concrete" and how to "create relationships with others that are more equal" (2017: 1).

subordinated gender to a politics that continues to be authoritarian and highly gendered (Lewis 2008, Hassim 2004).[5]

The institutionalising of gender conversely allows gender to be shaped by institutional cultures (Lewis 2008: 3, Hassim 2004, 2005, 2006)—not only through "the structures of political opportunity but also by the universe of political discourse...by what is 'allowed' within the ideological paradigms of dominant political movements" (Hassim 2006: 247).[6] The "democratisation of the public sphere" was prioritised while "attempts to deal with social and cultural norms" were devalued (Hassim 2004: 7). Leaders and state organisations may propagate certain ideals on women's roles and bodies, state funding may flow more easily for certain NGO's than others, and legislation may be slow to protect and uphold women's sexual rights (Lewis 2008). Women may also "choose to become defenders and proponents of the status quo to protect their class interest and political power" (Lewis 2008: 4).[7] In addition, women's movements may feel they need "access to political power to pursue the interests of representation effectively" (Hassim 2005: 12), while what once were progressive women's movements may become demobilised through the state's "co-opting or repositioning" of these movements (Lewis 2008:5).

Equally challenging for South African feminism historically (as for feminism globally) has been finding common ground for the formation of feminist subjectivities that recognises, as Susan Hollander-Muter writes, "the differences in power and position within the social relations of society…[in constructing] a feminism based on our differences" (Hollander-Muter 1995:55). Jill Arnott states that "privilege-defined differences between women in South Africa have given rise to enormous and often unproductive tensions within local feminism" (in Daymond 1996: 87). According to Dabi Nkululeko, western white women often "understand sexism in their class societies but fail to understand it in the more complex situation of the Third World, where class and sex oppression are joined by colonial and racial oppression" (in Daymond 1996: 16). In other words, "where white women confront only gender oppression, black women are the victims of 'triple oppression'—racial oppression, class oppression and gender oppression" (Daymond 1996: 16-17). Nkululeko continues by suggesting that "as aliens to [black] experience, Euro-settler women have to overcome most of the trappings of their own experience, such as their own class interests and status, and they have to study closely their experience as part of the colonist-settler nation, dissociate themselves from it

[5] Shireen Hassim states that while "progressive inclusion belied the terms of participation", male dominance is retained in state organisations (Hassim 2004: 6). Within this environment women are also "coerced to play roles as patriarchy's spokespersons, custodians or aids (Lewis 2008:6).
[6] Women's autonomy for example, played second fiddle to the notion of 'alliance' within the post-colonial political institution in South Africa (Hassim 2004: 6).
[7] The ANC Women's League's support of Jacob Zuma is an example (Lewis 2008: 4).

before they can begin to comprehend the experience of the native women under colonialism" (in Daymond 1996: 17). Not less challenging to the forging of connections is the manner in which African "communal or collective identities (such as that of an ethnic group)" are considered as "primary" (Gouws 2014: 41).

Non-Political Sites for Resistance

In this context, Lewis writes on the urgency of building supportive "feminist cultures and movements" where solidarity is based on "crafted politics", rather than "any assumption of...shared experiences of oppression" (Lewis 2008: 9). Hassim, however, suggests that "broader struggles against oppression may bring into play opportunities for mobilising women's multiple identities in new ways" (Hassim 2006:45). Both Lewis (2008) and Hassim (2204, 2005) look away from political institutions toward a more 'community-based' answer for a coherent, transformational feminism.

Hassim argues for the recognition of the relationship between the state, political parties and solidarity associations such as "religious groups, stokvels and burial societies" as part of the broader 'women's movement' in South Africa (2004: 1-4). She defines the women's movement as "a broad umbrella encompassing diverse organisations and occupying a variety of spaces" (Hassim 2004: 11). While community-based women's organisations may lack resources, they often facilitate the emergence of "vibrant and creative forms of collective solidarity" (Hassim 2006: 258). They may provide "the arenas in which women develop collective consciousness that can be mobilised" (2004: 4), and offer "a form of 'exit', or retreat into a safe space" (Hassim 1991: 71). Echoing Temma Kaplan, Hassim believes that the activities within these types of organisations may not necessarily seem spectacular or politically significant, but they nonetheless serve as "important sources for the emergence of social movements" (2004: 4). This echoes prominent feminist theorist bell hooks who calls for pedagogy beyond the classroom, arguing that feminism can only achieve success through reaching out to ordinary women in ordinary settings: "churches, bookstores, homes where folks gather" (2003: xi-xii).

Lewis sees the building of both defiant and supportive (non-political) cultures not only in the traditional sense of community-based networks but within the mobilising potential of "African feminist e-activism" (2008: 10). She states that "the production and dissemination of alternative knowledge, through the media, the internet, can be a crucial resource in building new African feminist solidarities", seeing it essentially as an antidote to the "entrenched gendered biases" propagated by hegemonic institutions (Lewis 2008: 10). She also calls for attention to be paid to spontaneous gestures of solidarity that may "organically" erupt following intellectual activism (Lewis

2008: 10-11). She states that, for sisterhood and solidarity to emerge, we need to "engage much more adventurously with forms, styles and sites of resistance" (Lewis 2008: 11).

Hillsong's Colour Sisterhood and Colour Conference

For almost a decade, thousands of South African women from different races, ages and backgrounds gather annually in a movement that claims to "mobilise, inspire and strengthen them [women] to stand up against the various forms of injustice and be the change…in our nation and continent" (Lucinda Dooley in Visagie 2015). This event, called the Colour Conference, was headlined as "SA's largest women's event" by News24 in 2015 (Visagie 2015), with numbers reaching 10, 000 in attendance. [8]

The Colour Sisterhood is an initiative started and led by Pastor Bobbie Houston of Christian Pentecostal mega-church Hillsong. This non-political, global women's movement manifests across a collection of online and physical spaces. Sometimes associated (albeit from external sources) with feminism, the movement posits itself as a "full-scale response to all that had historically assailed the value and worth of women" (Houston 2016: 36).[9] The movement's rhetoric is centred on feminist notions of female empowerment, empathy and activation in terms of, but not limited to, women's interests.

Stating that it is a "movement of everyday women" from "all ages, nations and backgrounds", the Colour Sisterhood has since its inception 21 years ago come to attract tens of thousands of participants during its annual 'Colour Conferences', hosted across five continents in the cities of Sydney, Kiev, New York City, Los Angeles, London and Cape Town (Hillsong 2016: /colour/locations/). These conferences, running in each city as two events over a period of four days, are a collection of creative, vivid and spectacular performances aimed at creating an environment for 'spiritual' experience and subjective transformation while encouraging further participation, for example, in online initiatives, through financial contributions and by creating personal projects. The visual content and performances are not an accessory to the narrative, but are strongly interwoven within the tapestry of the various platforms it utilises to power its message.

The Colour Sisterhood movement is narrowly associated with Hillsong. Hillsong Church was founded by Brian and Bobbie Houston in Sydney, Australia in 1983 (Hillsong 2016: /about/). They now have

[8] City Vision. 2018. Sisterhood Gathers in Thugs. [O]. Available: https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/Local/City-Vision/sisterhood-gathers-in-gugs-20180221 [2018, March]
[9] Bruce, C. 2017. On Staying Vulnerable & Being Herself: Global 'Colour' Pastor, Bobbie Houston. [O]. Available: https://hope1032.com.au/stories/faith/2017/vulnerable-after-21-years-colour-conference-pastor-bobbie-houston/ [2018, Feb]

churches in over 21 countries, with attendance estimated at 130,000 weekly (*ibid.*). Hillsong, known for 'spectacular' worship services and events, opts for a type of "New Age feelgoodism" (Wade 2016: 665), and caters for "spiritual seekers" by tailoring its "'product' to the preferences of the consumer market" (2016: 664).[10] As the largest and fastest growing church globally, Hillsong has given rise to a notable amount of academic and other inquiries, mostly in terms of their "commercial interests, political influence and alleged involvement in unseemly practices" (Wade 2016: 662). It has been suggested that the church's influence reaches into Australian governmental policy-making (Maddox 2013a, 2013b), while the church's economic activities have come under scrutiny in Australian parliament. [11]

Hillsong has also enjoyed the attention of mainstream and popular media, often but not always in terms of controversial issues. In 2016 Hillsong was featured on an episode of Australian Channel 9's television show 'Inside Story' as well as in the feature film *Let Hope Rise* released by Pure Flix Entertainment (after being pulled from Warner Bros and Aldon Entertainment). The film focuses on Hillsong's music arm, Hillsong United, and documents Hillsong's rise from a small church in Sydney to a global evangelical and musical phenomenon.[12] [13] In 2015 the church made headlines for Brian Houston not reporting his father Frank Houston's sexual abuse of minors.[14] In the same year, the media was abuzz after thousands signed a petition for the removal of controversial U.S. pastor Marc Driscoll from Hillsong's guest speaker line-up after he made unseemly remarks about women.[15]

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[10] These notions will be more clearly described in the chapters that follow.

[11] The Age. 2005. Church Blessed by Liberal Handout. [O]. Available: https://www.theage.com.au/news/National/Church-blessed-by-liberal-handout/2005/02/17/1108609337248.html [2018, March]

[12] See Yap, T. 2014. Warner Bros Releasing a Film About Hillsong United in 2015. [O]. Available: http://www.hallels.com/articles/2165/20140702/warner-bros-releasing-a-film-about-hillsong-united-in-2015.htm [2018, September] and Lang, B. 2015. Relativity Lets Rights to 'Hillsong-Let Hope Rise' Revert to Producers (Exclusive). [O]. Available: https://variety.com/2015/film/news/relativity-hillsong-rights-bankruptcy-1201553230/ [2018, September].

[13] Hillsong's global ambitions are fast-tracked through the use of new media, such as, for example, television broadcasting (Marti 2017: 379-380) that allow them to reach 10 million viewers every week in over 180 countries (Hillsong 2016: /tv/). A large part of their success in infiltrating global markets has been their music and performance events designed to cater for a young, outgoing participant (Marti 2017, Wagner 2013). In 2013, Wagner notes that Hillsong had, since 1992 sold "over 14 million albums worldwide, and amassed over 30 gold and platinum awards", numbers which would have risen since.

[14] As president of the AOG (Assemblies of God) in Australia, Brian Houston came under inquiry by the Royal Commission in Australia for the organisation's failing to report his father's case to police. See Brown, R. 2015. Royal Commission Sex Abuse Inquiry Censures Hillsong Head Brian Houston. [O]. Available: https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/royal-commission-sex-abuse-inquiry-censures-hillsong-head-brian-houston-20151123-gl5esn.html [2018, October]

[15] Driscoll came under media fire for indirectly referring to women as 'penis houses' or 'penis homes', among many other severely sexist comments. See Safi, M. 2015. Hillsong to Review Decision to Invite Controversial U.S. Pastor as Speaker. [O]. Available: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/07/hillsong-defends-invitation-to-us-pastor-criticised-for-comments-about-women [2018, October].

According to the Colour Sisterhood origin myth (as narrated by Bobbie Houston), Houston received a "directive" through a "divine whisper" to start a conference for women while she was attending the Hillsong Conference in the Homebush Stadium, Sydney (Houston 2016: 15-17). The Colour Conferences closely resemble Hillsong's own conferences, while Hillsong's staff, musicians and speakers are flown all over the world during the Colour Conference weeks. As we shall see throughout this study, the Colour Sisterhood movement, its founder, and by association (and practice) the broader Hillsong movement are closely knit, and it is therefore necessary at times to keep within the analysis aspects of Hillsong as 'parent institution'.

Before submitting my proposal for this thesis, I had only heard of the Colour Conference in Cape Town from a family member who flew in every year from another city to attend. Being a person of faith, but not of denomination, I had not had a desire to attend the conference, even though my family member described the event as something magnificently creative, awe-inspiring and uplifting. After the 2017 Women's March events, however, I started thinking about places of gathering, non-political sites of resistance and platforms from where South African women from all backgrounds could mobilise. I became interested in critically examining the movement after seeing it headlined, as mentioned above, by South Africa's largest digital news publisher, News 24.

The movement's rhetoric, as will be seen throughout this study, continually narrates the feminist notion of 'women's empowerment' as first and foremost to its endeavours. Investigating the potential of the Colour Conference and Colour Sisterhood Movement as platform for the formation of feminist subjectivities as well as a place to gather and politically mobilise South African women seems warranted by the number of South African women who attend these conferences and the diversity they claim to celebrate. Since the 'post-secular' turn in feminist politics (Braidotti 2008a), churches, and other spiritual movements are increasingly placed in the critical spotlight, being held accountable and tested in terms of their inclusivity as well as transformatory potential.

Within South African history, the church has been instrumental in shaping subjectivities, having sadly been one of the major tools for forwarding the nationalist agenda before and during apartheid (McEwen and Steyn 2016: 1). When considering the complicity of the church in gender and racial injustice (which it often actively advocated) it is appropriate that 'the church' should drive transformation. Haley McEwen and Melissa Steyn state that "all religious communities have a role to play in social and economic transformation in South Africa" and that "the capacity of the religious sector to trouble the status quo through critical faith work and to offer meaning and vision of what an equitable and socially just society looks (and feels) like must be taken up as a central task of…religious communities" (2016: 7).

My interest is also in how the Colour Sisterhood movement is almost entirely driven by creative visual machinery. Its platforms are saturated with photography, videography, design and 'designed' merchandise; the narrative deliberately emphasising the processes involved in creating these visual aspects. The physical, annual conferences are essentially an assemblage of performances: individual and collective, theatrical and spiritual (Hillsong Colour 2017). 'The creative', more than visual expression, functions within the movement as a signifying philosophical construct. At the same time, the creative discourse attempts to make the movement 'accessible' (Wade 2015) across its various platforms, serves as place-making mechanism, and visually gives shape to 'Colour Sisterhood femininity'. This study however, situates visual analysis within a broader sociological analysis. In my effort to gain understanding of how the movement's elements function together as a "machine of subjectivation" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987), I followed an inter-textual approach. [16]

While I found what seems to be a growing body of literature (both academic and popular) on Hillsong during my time of writing, scholarly work on the Colour Sisterhood and Colour Conference seemed very limited. However, Marion Maddox, who is considered the "leading author in the intersection of religion and politics in Australia", published two articles zooming in on the Colour Sisterhood as part of her critical analysis of Hillsong.[17] In '"Rise Up Warrior Princess Daughters": Is Evangelical Women's Submission a Mere Fairy Tale?' (2013), Maddox looks at how male headship and women's submission is submerged within the discourse of these movements, while 'Prosper, Consume and Be Saved' (2013) examines an enfranchisement of Christianity and how this effectively reaches into other aspects of secular society. Both these articles are thoroughly researched and highly insightful, drawing convincing conclusions on aspects that would be relevant to my own research. Maddox's articles therefore almost curbed my decision to continue with this study. However, in light of how Maddox's focus is on events prior to 2010, and how recent scholarly analysis of the Colour Sisterhood seems largely absent, I believed ongoing research, buffered with that of Maddox, was justified.[18] [19] Also, added to the literature of the Colour Sisterhood is the recently published autobiographical-style book, *The Sisterhood* (2016) by Bobbie Houston, which

[16] Stuart Hall describes inter-textuality as the "accumulation of meanings across different texts, where one image refers to another, or has its meaning altered by being 'read' in the context of other images" (Hall 1997: 232).

[17] Macquarie University. 2018. Marion Maddox. [O]. Available: https://researchers.mq.edu.au/en/persons/marion-maddox [2018, September]

[18] Thomas J. Wagner notes in a footnote that "Hillsong moves so quickly and is expanding at such a rate that it would take an army of ethnographers to keep up" (Wagner 2013: 18).

[19] In a 2013 online article responding to Maddox's criticism in the above mentioned articles, Australian Christian newspaper Eternity News states that she has a "dated view of Hillsong". See Eternity News. A Critic of Religion, Marion Maddox Attacks Hillsong—and a Catholic Responds. [O]. Available: https://www.eternitynews.com.au/archive/secularist-marion-maddox-attacks-hillsong-and-a-catholic-responds/ [2018, September]

offers an in-depth historical account of the movement from the viewpoint of its founder and host. My main question was, however, how this global movement would function within a local, South African context, and whether it would contribute to the broader feminist movement here.

Universal Woman Subject and the Rights-Culture Debate

As Linzi Manicom writes, when South African women are still imbedded in economic, social, racial, and ideological divides "'Westocentric' citizenship theory" fails in its figurations for a "coherent political identity of women" (Manicom 2005: 28). Globally, but particularly in context of developing nations such as South Africa, the neo-liberalist constructions of a 'universal' feminist subject has marginalised minority cultures (Grewal and Kaplan 1994, Gouws 2014). Amanda Gouws writes that a "pre-occupation with human rights" has obscured the "social and political processes through which the subjectivities are forged" (Gouws 2014). 'Recognition' needs to include respect and dignity (that is both attitudinal and consequent to a change in 'structural position') toward the hybridity of the identity of the post-colonial subject (Gouws 2014: 49). At the same time, where "universal" and "customary" law are paralleled, as in the context of South Africa, the challenge is how to consummate these binaries while opposing intracultural inequality that may arise within customary practice, and to do this without effacing culture (Gouws 2014).[20] As Gouws writes via Harri Englund, there remains the need "to acknowledge relations between individuals, groups and minorities crying out for recognition, in a way that will not situate them as subjects in opposition to liberal individual rights" (2014: 49).

As an example of the ideological shifts that could foster a solution, Gouws talks about "living customary law" or "common sense understanding of traditional practices": a transformative, shifting and changing way of functioning within or recognising a specific culture (2014: 41-51). Through a practice of 'living customary law', women could, for example, assert their agency through applying those claims from customary or legal regimes of post-colonial society that "best suits their specific needs" (Gouws 2014: 51). Louise Du Toit, while critical of the "mythical reconstruction of tradition and culture" calls for women and men to "reinterpret and reappropriate their inherited meaning-giving traditions while validating women as fully human" (2014: 33). At the same time it is important

[20] In South Africa a "the codification of customary law" has resulted in "the power shift from communities to traditional leaders" (Gouws 2014: 42). "This has distorted the power of traditional leaders and the complex relationships they have with their subjects" (*ibid*.) resulting in "intragroup misrecognition" where women (and sometimes men) are the ones excluded from the "patriarchal pact" (Gouws 2014; 51). An example is how the Mtembhu community in KwaZulu Natal in South Africa refused land rights to single women with children as a result of how highly customary marriage is valued (Gouws 2014: 50-51). Harmful cultural practices may continue such as female genital mutilation (Du Toit 2014: 30) and women's sexual rights problematically remain the "favoured marker" of culture (2014: 17).

for all feminists to recognise those "practices of resistance" that are essentially 'feminist' but do not necessarily fall within the boundaries of "Western Enlightenment ideas" or its language (Du Toit 2014: 32)--"expressions of women's humanity and human rights" may take forms that do not readily make sense to "cultural outsiders" (Du Toit 2014: 18). Du Toit expounds this point by writing that:

> Without such vigilance, Western feminists and academics will perpetuate the myth that feminist activism and women's humanity are 'ideas that belong to the Western Enlightenment' and that Western feminists are in possession of an authentic understanding of these moral ideals not easily shared by women from other traditions. Of course, this myth is highly detrimental in that it portrays non-Western women as passive victims of their cultures' misogyny, and in a self-fulfilling way helps to enforce this as reality; it divides women along cultural and global (also often racial power fault lines); it impoverishes understanding of feminist aims and reduces the variety of forms that women's resistance may take; and most detrimentally, it inadvertently serves to the agendas of those cultural elites who cynically violate women's humanity in the name of cultural expression and allegiance—both 'Western' and non-Western cultures alike (2014: 18).

In other word, the traditional exclusion of black women's interests from the lexicon of 'feminism' (hooks 1981, 2000) may resurface through "equivalence or master theory" (Grewak & Kaplan 1994: 19). The question is how to link different 'feminist orientations' "without replicating cultural and economic hegemony" (*ibid.*).

Nomadic Feminism

Having taken on the project of addressing the complexity of a philosophical construct of feminist subjectivity that emphasises the "importance of differences" (Braidotti 1994a: 275) while functioning within a politics of 'situatedness' or 'location' (Braidotti 1994a, 2005), Rosi Braidotti, proposes what she calls the 'nomadic subject': a figuration or a myth, that allows one to "think through and move across established categories and levels of experience: blurring boundaries without burning bridges" (Braidotti 1994a: 2-5).

Braidotti calls for the fostering of "nomadic consciousness" from the vantage point of the term "yearning" that was described by hooks as a consciousness that "cuts across boundaries" and "could be fertile ground for the construction of empathy—ties that would promote recognition of common commitments and serve as a base for solidarity and coalition" (in Braidotti 1994a: 2). Braidotti describes nomadic feminist consciousness as a "form of resisting assimilation or homologation into dominant ways of representing the self" (1994: 25). The Nomad is "the kind of subject who has

relinquished all idea, desire, or nostalgia for fixity…although not altogether devoid of unity" (1994: 22), who has "forgotten to forget injustice and symbolic poverty" (1994: 25). For Braidotti, feminist genealogies ought to be constructed on "shared discursive and political practices", without neglecting the "attention to differences among women" (1994: 39). She states that "what is political is precisely this awareness of the fractured, intrinsically power-based constitution of the subject and the active quest for possibilities of resistance to hegemonic formations" (Braidotti 1994a:35).

In 'Affirming the Affirmative: On Nomadic Affectivity', Braidotti argues for a "specific grounded sense of singular subjectivities that are collectively bound and outward oriented"—a politics of location. "Nomadicism, therefore, is not fluidity without borders but rather an acute awareness of nonfixity of boundaries. It is the intense desire to go on trespassing, transgressing" (Braidotti 1994a: 36). She proposes through the notion of 'sustainability' that the subject needs to be re-grounded in a "materially embedded sense of responsibility and ethical accountability for the environments s/he inhabits" (Braidotti 2005). Rather than the global process where "quantified differences" are proliferated in endless cycles of commodified lack (Braidotti 2005, 2014), identity is seen as a range of Deleuzguattarian 'becomings' that are un-programmed "mutations, disruptions, and points of resistance" (Braidotti 2005).

The shape of the spaces inhabited is also not independent of the movements of the nomad, but become what they are by their very presence. In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari propose that where the nomad walks "the land ceases to be land, tending to become simply ground…or support…The nomads inhabit these places; they remain in them, and they themselves make them grow, for it has been established that the nomads make the desert no less than they are made by it" (1987: 421). Inasmuch the nomad dwells easily in the smooth open, in-between nomadic spaces, it is the presence of the nomad by which they are shaped. "They add desert to desert, steppe to steppe" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 421).

Braidotti's (1994, 2011) poetic nomadic philosophy lends its figuration for 'dynamic thought' (that is at once 'situated' but continually in the 'process of traversing boundaries') to my project which is concerned with the deterritorialising of hegemonic relationships and representations within the context of femininity as well as religion. It offers ways of thinking through the traditional boundaries that have separated these spheres, as well as the boundaries of race, class, gender and other forms of difference that have divided women.

Religion as Homeground for Transformatory Practices

Jonathan Z. Smith writes that "religion is a distinctive mode of human creativity" but that this is a "creativity which both discovers limits and creates limits for human existence" (1978:291). Religion is "a variety of attempts to map, construct and inhabit …positions of power" (Smith 1978: 291). From the very beginning of this study, we therefore seem to be facing a paradox, for if 'religion' is "the quest, within the bounds of the human, historical condition…[for] 'space' in which to meaningfully dwell" (Smith 1978: 291), we may very-well be faced with a system pre-occupied with the creation of subjective boundaries standing therefore as the antithesis of the nomadic project. Deleuze and Guattari write that "the sacred place of religion is fundamentally a centre that repels the obscure *nomos*" (1987: 422), *nomos* being "the backcountry, a mountainside, the vague expanse around a city", suitable 'nomadic space' as it stands in contrast to *polis*, the city within boundaries, the law (1987: 420).

Deleuze and Guattari, however, do not deny 'religion-nomadicism' and how it has historically functioned as a war-machine, using examples such as Islamic militarism and the Christian Crusades. They write that while it may "very well compensate for its specific deterritorialisation with a spiritual and even physical reterritorialisation...when religion sets itself up as a war machine, it mobilises and liberates a formidable charge of nomadism or absolute deterritorialisation" (1987: 423). Sadly, the figuration of the religious nomad as conquering zealot may conjure only negative images of holy wars and religiously driven terrorism, denying religion a non-extremist anti-pole as possible site for positive resistance to subjugating 'state-forms'. For some, as Radford Ruether writes concerning theological feminism, "the God-language of the prophetic tradition is destabilising toward the existing social order and its hierarchies of power---religious, social, and economic" (in Van Leeuwen 1993: 125). She continues: "Its understanding of salvation is neither conformist nor privatistic. Rather it is the vision of an alternative future, a new "deal" of peace and justice that will arise when the present systems of in justice have been overthrown" (Ruether in Van Leeuwen 1993: 125).

Instead of viewing a religious or faith based movement as being necessarily repulsive of the nomadic endeavour, I propose, that 'religious space' may, in certain instances, stand as a metaphor for 'home', and is therefore, for some, inseparable from the very ground inhabited. Within Braidotti's argument, she allows space for a notion of 'home', the nomad not being an 'exile' or a 'migrant' but having "definite, seasonal patterns of movement through rather fixed routes" (Braidotti 1994a: 21-22). Or, as she puts it later on, while the nomad is constantly 'in transition', the nomad is not "unwilling to create those necessarily stable and reassuring bases for identity that allow one to function in a community" (Braidotti 1994a: 33).

As mentioned briefly above, the recently so-called 'post-secular turn in feminism' (Braidotti 2008a) has ushered in new interest in women's spiritual and religious identities and practices. Braidtotti notes in 'In Spite of the Times: The Postsecular Turn in Feminism' that "subjectivity is...a process ontology of auto-poeisis and self-styling, which involves complex continuous negations with dominant norms and values, and hence multiple forms of accountability" (2008: 2). Therefore, "agency, or political subjectivity, can actually be conveyed through and supported by religious piety" (Braidotti 2008a: 2). Braidotti calls for a diversified approach that contextualises "all the monotheistic religions" within "shifting global power relations" (2008a: 3).[21]

Aims and Objectives

Launching off the premise that non-political, faith-based movements within South Africa may contribute to its broader feminist movement, I critically question whether the Colour Conference and Colour Sisterhood movement of mega-Pentecostal church Hillsong can stand as a potential 'site' for the production of nomadic feminist subjectivities—globally, but more specifically within the context of South Africa. This study comprises a critical analysis of the visual, narrative, spatial and performative as constituents of Hillsong's Colour Sisterhood movement across its various platforms, including online and social media, literature and the Colour Conference Cape Town 2017. I firstly attempt to sketch the Colour Conference experience as 'place' (physical, virtual and subjective) that emerges through and within the creative while trying to gain an understanding of how place, ritual and 'the creative' is employed as a meaning-making machinery.

I proceed to look at how 'Colour Sisterhood femininity' is visually and rhetorically defined and represented, importantly within the context of issues of difference, triple oppression and other variegated 'plateaus of experience' including historical experience, voice, citizenship and representation. I then explore how the movement mobilises femininity and how the avenues for and representations of women's mobilisation are formulated. Lastly I look at the relationship between the notion of 'feminism' and the movement, and how feminist politics translates within its various media.

The topics and elements identified and focused on in this analysis are strongly connected to my own personal experience at the Colour Conference in Cape Town 2017. Rather than focus on a specific theme my desire was to gain a broad understanding of this very expansive, 'multi-platform' movement, not only from the viewpoint of an outsider, but partly from that of its participants as well as its creators. By looking at the different elements separately as well as a 'unity' I hoped to give

[21] An important part of this argument is the recognition of the many historical failures of "Enlightenment-based secular humanism", such as "colonialism, Auschwitz, Hiroshima and the Gulag" (Braidotti 2008a: 8).

credit to aspects that may successfully contribute to the formation of feminist subjectivities while identifying those that do not.

Sadly, it may seem as if the manipulative tactics and failures of the movement in terms of the pursuit of sexual justice are evident early on in this study and that this presupposes an inevitable conclusion before it is reached by the text. At the same time, this paper may be seen as offering a paradoxical argument—on the one hand it argues for the potential of the movement as creative, non-political and religious site as deterritorialising agent within the broader South African feminist movement, while the conclusions clearly show the movement in fact fails in constructing minority or nomadic subjectivating practices. In trying to understand the ideological workings of the 'machine of subjectivation' that is this movement, I may therefore at times, rather than engaging a radically critical stance, seem sympathetic to the endeavour. This is the price of my need to retain the viewpoint that there may in fact *be* possibilities for the formation of transformative subjectivities, but that these are hindered or negated by certain ideologies, practices or refusals to break with tradition (whether fundamentalist or those from mainstream culture). I hope that this waxing and waning will be seen as a hermeneutic device expounding the Braidottian philosophy of 'as if': a "performative metaphor that allows for otherwise unlikely encounters and unsuspected sources of interaction of experience and of knowledges" stemming from an "emphatic proximity" or "intensive interconnectedness" (Braidotti 1994a: 4-5). The 'as-if' mode affirms fluid boundaries while allowing for the revisiting of territories, and rescuing from them what is needed to "trace transformation of our lives here and now" (Braidotti 1994a: 6).

Main Theorists, Literature and Theoretical Frameworks

In *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* Rosi Braidotti argues for feminism as a practice that "asserts sexual difference as a positive force" and confronts "the multiple differences of class, race, age, lifestyle and sexual preference" (1994: 30). The theory of feminist nomadicism evokes the image of the nomad who is not homeless but has "relinquished all idea, desire or nostalgia for fixity" (Braidotti 1994a: 22). The nomad occupies a non-place—a Utopia that shifts and moves as the nomad moves (Braidotti 1994a).

Braidotti criticises the wrongly assumed universality of the subject while positively affirming women's desire to "affirm and enact different forms of subjectivity" (Braidotti 1994a: 30). For Braidotti "the struggle for equality" is interwoven with "the affirmation of difference" (1994: 161). Most important to the project of nomadicism is "the refusal to disembody sexual difference into a

new allegedly 'postmodern' and 'antiessentialist' subject, and the will to reconnect the whole debate on difference to the bodily existence and experience of women" (Braidotti 1994a: 160).

As already stated in the sections above, I turn to nomadic feminism as a figuration for feminism encapsulating an awareness of difference that does not deny 'the place from which one is speaking'. I see nomadic feminist philosophy, a feminism of difference, as a useful, creative construct offering a figuration and a language against which and through which the construction of subjectivity and other elements within the movement may be evaluated. The figure of the nomad as 'image' seems particularly useful in its application to visual and narrative 'imagery'. Further works cited here by Braidotti are, among others, *The Posthuman*, and the journal articles 'Punk Women and Riot Grrls' (2015), 'In Spite of the Times: The Postsecular Turn in Feminism' (2008a), and 'Affirming the Affirmative: On Nomadic Affectivity' (2005).

Woven throughout Braidotti's nomadic politics and similarly being a thread underlying and surfacing oftentimes in this study is the work of philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalysist Felix Guattari. The provocative and expansive work, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) by these authors, is essentially a philosophy of multiplicity that seeks to destabilise the unwavering 'I'. It proposes 'nomad thought' as free from the "edifice of an ordered interiority" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: xii). Nomad thought "does not repose on identity; it rides on difference. It does not respect the artificial division between the three domains of representation, subject concept, and being; it replaces restrictive analogy with a conductivity that knows no bounds" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: xii).

While I favour Braidotti's work on nomadic thought for its feminist application, Deleuze and Guattari's work (to which her thought process owes much) offer a range of theories and vocabulary used throughout this study. The notions of 'deterritorialisations' or 'lines of flight' describe how multiplicities function as 'journeys' away from a 'Centre', ideologically resulting in an evening out on a flat plane those ideals, institutions, social formations, signs, or historicity that would usually be hierarchically constructed (Deleuze & Guattari 1987). Another figuration that is useful here is the 'rhizome' as decentred ideological entity which may be a mechanism of analysis or figuration for ideological or physical phenomena: "a rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organisations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences and social struggles" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 8).

In a way, this study can be seen as following a rhizomatic methodology of analysis as circumscribed via the Deleuzoguattarian notion by Eileen Honan and Margaret Sellers (2006). They describe this methodology as "making connections between quite different thoughts, ideas, pieces of data,

discursive moments" and that "these 'assemblages' form 'plateaus'"—a multiplicity connected to another multiplicity via "underground stems" (Honan & Stellers 2006).[22] Other Deleuzoguattarian theories that surface in my text are those of 'the refrain' and 'faciality' (Deleuze & Guattari 1987), while further works by these authors used in this study are the books *Chaosmosis* by Guattari and *Cinema 1* by Deleuze.

In order to root my research question within the South African landscape, I partly draw on the field of social-anthropology. A key focus is on Shireen Hassim's historically political analysis of the state of feminism within South Africa as well as her argument for the ideological and political inclusion of non-political movements as part of the 'women's movement' in South Africa, as expressed in 'Voices, Hierarchies and Spaces: Reconfiguring the Women's Movement in Democratic South Africa' (2004). A useful aspect of this article is the attributes ascribed to 'feminine movements' that may function to become politically transformative—i.e. feminist. A line is drawn between women's political participation and the central issue of levels of 'difference' pertinent to the lived experiences of South African women in 'Gender, Social Location and Feminist Politics in South Africa' (1991). The article 'Women's Studies and the Women's Movement' (1992), co-edited by Hassim and Cherryl Walker, questions the representation of black women within academia. The concept of 'voice', especially of black women within South Africa, is an important consideration within Chapter 2. Other literature that has been useful in describing elements of South African women's citizenship, rights, gender politics and multiculturalism from feminist perspectives are *(Un)thinking Citizenship: Feminists Debates in Contemporary South Africa* (2005) edited by Amanda Gouws and *Gender and Multiculturalism: North-South* edited by Gouws and Daiva Stasiulis.

As briefly mentioned, Marion Maddox's articles, '"Rise Up Warrior Princess Daughters": Is Evangelical Women's Submission a Mere Fairy Tale?' (2013a), and 'Prosper, Consume and Be Saved' (2013b) are important to my research. In the first, Maddox's (2013a) identification of how 'headship language' functions to undermine women's potential leadership within the Hillsong and Colour Sisterhood movement, as well as her description of the movements' 'princess theology' proceeds and buffers my own research. Importantly, Maddox's recognition of the 'dominionist flavour' (2013a) present in the teachings of these movements becomes an important part of arguments I

[22] Honan & Stellers (2006) propose various markers for what can be considered 'rhizomatic' writing. The first is that writing is essentially a "closing off" of writing that in fact wants to "fly off in all directions"—it is a thoughtful process of producing writing that "ellipses" and ventures into different discursive spaces. Secondly, rhizomatic writing understands that discourses, rather than "operate as straight lines through a text", "merge, connect and cross-over each other", allowing for "much more productive and agentic relations" between its various discourses and voices (Honan & Stellers 2006). Lastly, the "rhizomatic journey" offers a "multiplicity of signs that point to a variety of paths that can be taken in the interpretation of data—it recognises the presence of the 'individual' within this interpretation (*ibid*.)

make in terms of 'women's worship' and the movement's self-placement as 'above femininity' in the first and last chapters. The latter article lends to the study the valuable insight on 'obligatory consumerism' as signifier of 'having come into spiritual grace' (Maddox 2013b). Two other works on Hillsong practices that I turn to within this study are Matthew Wade's article 'Seeker-Friendly: The Hillsong Mega-church as an Enchanting Total Institution' (2016) and Thomas J. Wagner's doctoral thesis ' Hearing the Hillsong Sound: Music, Marketing, Meaning and Branded Spiritual Experience at a Transnational Mega-church' (2013). Wade compares Hillsong to the notion of 'total institution' described by Erving Goffman (1962) that, through re-enchantment practices (Wade 2013), reproduces the "mechanisms of the economic order" (2013: 661). Wagner's thesis, while sometimes seeming to take an apologist stance on Hillsong, follows an ethnomusicological approach in exploring the Hillsong brand. His extensive research on the movement and its music, and the methodologies it employs within its marketing, is relevant here as background research as well as more directly within specific sections of this paper.

Colour Sisterhood movement founder and leader Bobbie Houston's book *The Sisterhood* (2016) is an important resource as well as motivator for this study. The book is an autobiographical account of the movement as well as its author, offering a comprehensive overview of the movement's history from a very limited viewpoint. This, in itself, is an interesting vantage point from which to approach analysis on a variety of aspects within this movement. The insight this book offers into the psyche and desires of the person with whom the movement is undeniably closely intertwined is invaluable, perhaps, even more so than the narrated biography of the movement itself.

Chapter Breakdown

Chapter 1

The first chapter seeks greater understanding on how the Colour Sisterhood movement functions as a 'place of subjectivation'. It explores the relationship between place, the' worship ritual' and 'the creative' as place-making strategies, drawing on the work of Deleuze and Guattari on art as 'minor practice' and Jonathan Z. Smith on 'ritual as place'. I describe how 'women's worship' is construed as means of 'women's empowerment' during the 2017 Colour Conference, especially in the sermons of speaker John Gray, and how this sublime, affective spectacle may become a means to bolster the credibility of the Colour Conference as 'site' for divine encounter, and thereby the Colour Sisterhood as brand. I argue that 'the creative' functions within the movement as more than merely artistic or aesthetic expression but that the movement constructs 'the creative' as a philosophical, ontological entity and signifier for the transcendental or 'the Divine'. 'The creative' becomes 'place' for the

shaping of collective desire by being narrated as 'site' for the interpretation of divine will. 'Divine will' is however, narrowly fused with the will and desires of the author, leaving very little possibility for 'lines of flight' from the 'Centre'.

Chapter 2

In the second chapter I place the conference and movement firmly within the South African context, relying on Shireen Hassim's argument for the possibility of non-political spaces to become transformational contributors to the women's movement. I focus on how Colour Sisterhood femininity is defined and represented in terms of difference and sameness, belonging and exclusion. It explores how territories of power are established visually and narratively through the notions of an elitist-defined pan-humanistic (or universal) collective Sisterhood femininity set against a dichotomising 'victim other', and its implications within the context of South Africa. The chapter explores the notion of 'compulsory flourishing' as part and parcel of the Colour Sisterhood identity myth and its exclusionary implications. In addressing issues of difference, an important question within this chapter is whether space is created for the emergence of diverse and local 'voices' and conversations around women's daily lived and historical experiences.

Chapter 3

The third chapter provides an overview of how the Colour Sisterhood defines women's mobilisation and the avenues it presents for activation. I embrace the argument as put forward by Chia Longman and Braidotti in the context of 'post-secular' feminism that 'women's only' spiritual spaces may have 'outward-bound' transformatory implications. However, I argue that rather than 'empowering' women to mobilise, as claimed in its rhetoric, the movement offers women a 'faux power' by means of 'substitution fantasies' that ultimately negate women's empowerment. Again, I relate these questions to the South African context.

Chapter 4

The final chapter looks at the relationship between 'feminism' as notion, feminist politics and the Colour Sisterhood Movement. The question I try to answer is whether the feminist rhetoric that infuses the movement's discourses can be seen as being in service of the pursuit of women's empowerment or whether it is merely appropriated as a 'world-affirming' tactic. Via the performances of John Gray during the 2017 Colour Conference in Cape Town, I explore how femininity continues to be constructed in terms of gender complementarity, and how this femininity is represented through traditional stereotyped dichotomising gender traits. I look at the movement's unwillingness to reject rhetoric of 'male headship' within its (apparent) propagation of

'female leadership'. Lastly, I argue that the movement takes on a dominionist-inspired position as being 'beyond' or 'above' feminism.

Chapter 1

Colour Your World: How Ritual and 'The Creative' Function as Place-Makers within the Colour Sisterhood

Introduction

> What is the fantasy of art? To lead out of what is present, out of what is close, out of representations of space, into what is further off, into nature, into symbols, into representational spaces (Lefebvre 231-232).

It is the Colour Conference 2017 in Cape Town. Ten thousand women gather to, in the words of founder and host, Bobbie Houston (2017), "experience the room". An atmosphere of heightened anticipation is tangible as the arena is darkened. A slow, intense sound emerges—a base harmonic line of progressive, repetitive piano rhythms accompanied by strings, stretched out over several minutes. The large digital screens that form a triptych-backdrop behind the stage solitarily begin emitting an assemblage of flashing, non-representational colour planes, bold letters, textures, shapes and figurative representations, in this case in predominantly a Klein-like blue and black.

A panoramic insert appearing across the middle screen displays a pulsing, monochromatic montage sequence of images of what appear to be close-ups of microbiological entities, primitive marks, technological symbols and representations of sound waves. A bearded male form in modern attire emerges to reach out to a light, something beyond the chaos, and the elements begin to give way to more naturalist city and forest landscapes. A figure looks out over a river or dam, followed by a close-up of a hand in a white robe performing what could be a sacred gesture above the water. An image of an eye gives way to a series of lines, dots, dashes, symbols and graphs that appear to be representations of sound, flashing, flickering and streaming across the screens. The music builds in intensity while the graphics are similarly quickened until finally 'reeled in' to climax quietly in what sounds like waves or wind. A male voice narrates over images that vary between those of the ocean and night-time urban landscapes: "Before the beginning, there was Him, all things gigantic, volcanic and romantic were first found in Him, the very fabric of time was knitted by him. Future, present, past is where you'll find Him… He colours our darkest moments in techni-colour and HD, and when no-one can see our pain He sees".[23]

The rhetoric gains momentum over filmic imagery of waves, surfers, city-scapes, and people playing basketball, walking and riding skate-boards and buses. Short flashes here and there of what appears

[23] Colour Conference 2017 Cape Town Worship Session. 2017. [Video Recording by Author of Colour Conference 2017 Cape Town]

to be pastors giving sermons, most likely within the Hillsong context infiltrate these 'real world' sequences. The words from John 10:10 in the Message translation read across the screen "I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better than they ever dreamed of"; the crowd spontaneously begin clapping hands in unison, some moving forward to dance in front of the stage as the worship team ascends it. The music ends as an image of a blue cross triumphs across the middle screen, the use of smoke machines splintering the stage lighting into rays of light pouring down toward the crowd.

During these performances, digital imagery continues to play out against the background in this manner. The imagery seems to be largely a contemporary mix of up-beat, non-representational art, short documentary-style scenes and Christian icons and motifs, with snippets of the songs also sometimes displayed as graphics. The audience members are collectively prompted by the various moments of climax arising from the digital, musical and performance assemblage, erupting spontaneously into moments of audible prayer, dancing, crying or other bodily expressions of worship.[24]

This scene, one of many designed to offer conference-goers a sense of spectacular spiritual sublimation and evoke an electric emotional ecstasy, will be repeated six times, across six nations during the Colour Conferences 2017. Every conference is meticulously orchestrated to remain as much as possible within the bounds of the original conference blueprint, which is done in-house by the Colour Sisterhood's creative team in Sydney.[25] [26] Within the Colour movement, the imagery and 'language' used throughout its various platforms, the repetition of elements, of worship rituals, and the (re)creation of spaces through visual devices (such as the 'design' of the conferences) allow for a

[24] Worship, for the purpose of this study, I define as a collective expression of devotion, supplications, or exaltation to God through music, song and bodily expression. The 'atmosphere' within the conference space is meant to conduce 'affective worship' through, as identified by Hynes and Wade of Hillsong, seductive sound management, evocative pastoral invocations, and building "collective tension" to the point of ecstatic climax (2012: 175). The worship team is the band of musicians and singers who perform the worship music.

[25] See the short documentary *Colour: The Making of a Story 2016 (*Hillsong 2016: /colour/stories/). Carl-Hugo Anger, the event manager states that "for Colour, nothing is left to just 'let us see what happens', from the toilet door signs, to...where we enter delegates, to how we set up the room, what goes on seats, everything is very 'thought through'" (Anger in Hillsong 2016: colour/stories/).

[26] Speaking on the importance of this 'replication of environment' within the South African context is an account by Jonathan Bandli, Creative Director at Cape Town based company, Bad Weather. He describes the process of lighting production for the Cape Town Colour Conferences, as a complex process that needs to "be done while maintaining the heart of the design and keeping the creative elements intact, as the focus on continuity is vital for a global experience" (Bandli in DWR TEAM 2015). He states: "The team works extremely closely with Hillsong South Africa's local Lighting Designer, Hendre Bloem, who has a deep understanding of the direction of the conference and the church's overall creative identity. Colour Conference production is designed and creatively birthed…in Sydney by Hillsong Australia and their team…[and the] design is amended to fit local gear supplier kit lists, quantities and venue capabilities…[while working] hand in hand with Hillsong South Africa's Production Manager, Alan Leviton" (*ibid.*).

desired collective subjective experience. It is meant to create 'a world' across the movement's global transitory 'spaces'; a singular experience of 'place'. Echoing urban genesis (Smith 1987:50-51) the 'holy house' is proliferated to become a new, global ceremonial complex... albeit now multiplied across not only the physical (for example the arenas) but the virtual (through online presence) and subjective, produced by the imaginary, by desire, fantasy and ritual.

During the 2017 Cape Town Conference, emphasis was continually placed on being present in "this space", "the room", "this atmosphere" or "the house", with on-stage exhortations made often to 'experience' the 'atmosphere'. Houston defines this 'atmosphere' as "gorgeous moments inspired through worship and creativity" stating that it takes the 'Sisterhood' into a "new realm of reality and authority…that would, in time, redefine harsh realities into something more lovely and beautiful" (2016: 73). The 'space'—or 'new realm'—given form through 'the creative' and ritualistic practices of worship, is seen as a gateway to the divine, while the effects of having attended and affectively worshipped in this space is seen as real-world. These effects are narrated as building camaraderie as a 'Sisterhood', or as miraculous physical or subjective happenings or 'healings' (Houston 2016).

We should perhaps think of the movement, and particularly its conference as an Augéan non-place (Augé 1995) in that, *contra* Wade (2016) on Hillsong, it does not attempt to replace the social bonds of the external world (as a sort of contemporary Goffmanian 'total institution'), but rather seems to have the characteristics of an area of transit.[27] While a space is seen as becoming 'place' by means of its relationality, history, and concern with identity (Augé 1995: 77), non-places are "listed, classified, promoted to the status of 'places of memory' ("hotel chains…holiday clubs and refugee camps")—crowded spaces "surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporary and the ephemeral" (Augé¨1995: 78). This comparison will seem more applicable as the study progresses. [28]

Being non-place does not necessarily void a site of the potential to shape new affirmative solidarities that may be actively rallied in the pursuit of transformative endeavours. The analogy for 'nomadic subjectivities' is precisely that they reside in a shifting and re-shifting, in the in-between, the "spaces of transit", "areas of transition" (Braidotti 1994a: 18-19). They may therefore be an equivalent for

[27] Erving Goffman describes a 'total institution' as "a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life" (Goffman 1961: xxi). While, as argued by Wade (2016) Hillsong can be compared to a 'total institution', the Colour Movement has a decidedly different approach to how it builds 'community'.

[28] Another characteristic of non-place that seems applicable to the Colour Conference and broader movement, as will surface in this paper, is how they offer only a way-one way form of communication, particularly as "'instructions for use', which may be prescriptive…prohibitive…or informative" (Augé 1995: 96)—"individuals are supposed to interact only with texts, whose proponents are not individuals but 'moral entities'" (*ibid.*). Also, these places offer a sense of a "perpetual present" (Augé 1995: 105)—"what reigns here is the actuality, the urgency of the present moment" (Augé 1995: 103-104).

the desert (the habitat of the nomad (Deleuze & Guattari 1987)) by the very fact of their "enormous, alienating solitude that characterises them but also because they are heavily marked by signs and boards indicating a multitude of possible directions" (Braidotti 1994a: 20).

Similarly, during its annual conferences, the Colour Sisterhood's ritual 'space' is given form by different forms of 'the creative', which I define as firstly, a term that encapsulates aesthetic visual endeavours, but also, as narrated by the movement, a signifier or ontological construct beyond that which can be experienced physically, or sensorially. In return, the participant creates an affective spectacle that becomes part of the ritual landscape. Within an atmosphere of religious faith, the creative ritual environment both instigates and sustains what is believed to be a collective subjective transcendental experience, thereby aiming to access and shape desire on a deeper emotional and spiritual level. The "affective labour" produced by the audience member, as Wade puts it, cultivates a "palpable openness among seekers and devotees to affecting and being affected", forge relationships, and produce new subjectivities (Wade 2012: 670).

In contemporary times, there has been a resurgence of public interest in ethics, the establishment of moral norms and religious practices. Braidotti argues that, what is thought of as the post-secular turn has developed in response to the failings of "Enlightenment-based secular humanism" (Braidotti 2008a: 8). She stresses a need for neo-vitalist thought ("a philosophy of flows and flux" that "presupposes and benefits from the philosophical monism that is central to a material and non-unitary vision of subjectivity") "which stresses the creative potential of social phenomena that may appear negative at first (Braidotti 2008a: 13). Neo-vitalist thought, being non-hierarchical and non-fascist, is eco-philosophical, valuing "one's reliance on the environment in the broadest sense of the term (Braidotti 2008a: 13-16).

Ideally, then, ritual practices and the 'phantasmagoric spaces' (Kapferer 2004: 47) created by and for ritual have the potential to deterritorialise and reterritorialise subjectivity and produce 'real world' transformations. Guattari talks about "Territorialised Assemblages of enunciation" that have been semiotised by "systems of representation and multirefenced practices", managing to "crystallise complementary segments of subjectivity" (1995: 98). "They released social alterity through the union of filiation and alliance; they induced personal ontogenesis through the operation of peer groups and initiations, such that individuals found themselves enveloped by any number of transversal collective identities" (Guattari 1995: 98). Bruce Kapferer writes of 'rites' that they are "a dynamic that allows for all kinds of potentialities of human experience to take shape and form", enabling "participants to break free from the constraints and determinations of everyday life and

even from the determinations of the constructed ritual space itself" (Kapferer 2004: 47).[29] "The aesthetics, repetitions, careful detailing, slowing of tempo, shifting position of participants, recontextualisations etc., are major means for readjusting the processes within life, that among other things, permit life as it is lived to regain its uninterrupted flow" (*ibid.*).

"Dance, music, the elaboration of plastic forms and signs on the body, on objects on the ground were, in archaic societies, intimately connected with ritual activities and religious expression" (Guattari 1995: 98). Concurrently, the ritual effects of 'art' "engender unprecedented, unforeseen and unthinkable qualities of being (Guattari 1995: 106). As with rites, art creates an "ontological heterogenification of Universes of reference...an abstract, machinic transversality articulating the multiplication and particularisation of (existential Territories)" (Guattari 1995: 107). Creativity may "promote active, processual ruptures within semiotically structured, significational and denotative networks, where it will put emergent subjectivity to work" (Guattari 2015: 19). In other words, art, or creativity is a means to "expropriate...old rigid ideological structures" (Guattari 2015: 106).

Creativity, like ritual space, both physically and virtually, has the potential to both subjectively and socially forge new connections free from pre-existing hierarchies (Guattari 1995). 'The creative' manufactures desire—it is a desiring-machine that creates "veritable group fantasies in which desiring-production is used to short circuit social production, and to interfere with the reproductive function of technical machines by introducing an element of dysfunction" (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 31). Following from the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari Simon O' Sullivan writes:

> Art…undoes the triple organisation of affections, perceptions and opinion—that is to say our habitual mode of being—and substitutes something else, a different organisation or assemblage, a different 'take' on the world, in fact a different world in itself…art's power to deterritorialise, its affective dimension, is actually produced through 'history', through the utilisation, and mixture of past forms, past affective assemblages (2006:67).

The 'spectacularisation' of mega-church culture and ritual through aesthetic devices as described in terms of the Colour Conferences above, has, however, fallen under the critical lens of both religious and secular scholars, most often evoking a connection between these practices and the Church as economically-driven institution. Matthew Wade (2016), drawing on the work of George Ritzer, compares Hillsong to 'cathedrals of consumption' that thrives through employing 'mechanisms of re-enchantment'. According to Wade, mega-church spaces often become "arenas where magic and

[29] Kapferer continues that "ritual virtuality may be conceived...as a space in which participants can re-imagine (and redirect and re-orientate themselves) into the everyday circumstances of life"—"it is a means for engaging immediately with the very ontological ground of being" (Kapferer 2004: 47-49).

wonder are produced by way of rationalised means such as large scale theme parks" (Wade 2016: 666). He writes following Max Weber that: "These cathedrals of consumption must navigate a narrow path, for although spectacle and wonder are certainly effective in slaking our desires as consumers, they can also induce alienation if one sees the 'specialists' without 'spirit'" (Wade 2016: 666).[30] In *Holy Mavericks: Evangelical Innovators and the Spiritual Marketplace* , Shayne Lee and Phillip Luke Sinitiere take a more positive stance toward the "social, cultural and spiritual" 'dexterity' of 'evangelical innovators' (2009: 24) and the way in which they are apparently able to manipulate church culture to suit the "tastes and desires of religious consumers" (2009: 3). Apologists of mega-church practices Scott Thumma and Dave Travis defend the "elaborateness of the 'show'", including the "theatre-style seating" and their "build-in cup holders" (2007: 149-150).

My purpose is here to examine the Colour Sisterhood movement's production of desire through the autopoeietic relationship between ritual space and 'the creative'.[31] The first section of this chapter sketches the 'worship ritual' and how it functions as main place-making strategy, while arguing that 'women's worship' is promoted as a distinct gendered category in the services of John Gray, as well as elsewhere through the movement's representations. The second part explores how 'the creative' itself is made 'place' by being narrated as a 'virtual' space where divine desire is realised. Within a women-only atmosphere, I question whether these 'sites' may become spaces of deterritorialisation, for example, in challenging gender-essentialism, in promoting 'lines of flight' to an outside allowing for fluidity and inclusivity, and in forging connections. However, these questions will not be fully answered here; instead this chapter seeks to 'set the stage', so to speak, for the rest of the study by creating a sense of the conferences and broader Colour Sisterhood movement, and to introduce some of these key issues, with which I will continue to engage throughout this work.

In this endeavour I keep in mind a framework drawn up by Simon 'O Sullivan, following from the work of Deleuze and Guattari, on 'minor literature' (that which disrupts the discourses of 'major', or mainstream literature), consisting of three points of criteria through which art may become revolutionary—a war machine (2006: 70-82).

1. "The deterritorialisation of major language": While "a minor literature does not occur 'elsewhere' or 'apart from' a major literature, but on the contrary operates from within" (as

[30] Wade alludes to the work of Max Weber (1930) (who had early on conceptualised a sociological link between religion and economics) on the loss, through processes of rationalisation, of 'practices of magic' as means to attain 'salvation' (Weber 1930: 71). These mechanisms of re-enchantment may help to ensure that religion continues to once again become and remains the "opium of some masses" (Braidotti 2008a: 11).
[31] Introducing the movement within its website, Houston writes that "creativity, worship and the presentation of God's timeless and proven Word (the bible) are foundational, along with an unpretentious and fabulous environment that welcomes everyone (sic)" (in Hillsong 2017: Colour).

discussed from Braidotti's work ealier), "it uses the same elements but in a different manner…producing movement from 'within' the major" (O'Sullivan 2006: 72). "A minor art pushes up against the edges of representation; it bends it, forces it to the limits" O' Sullivan 2006: 73). However, he also affirms that minor art, or affective ruptures, may indeed be a "detteriotorialisation accompanied a reterritorialisation"---"generating new forms through a break, but also a utilisation of the old" (O'Sullivan 2006: 73).

2. In minor art everything is political: "A minor art will connect different regimes together, and in particular will connect art to the wider social milieu". This can simply be understood as 'connectivity', or bringing "art down to life" (O'Sullivan 2006: 74). This does not necessarily mean that the art needs to be concerned with 'political practice' or organisations, but rather that it brings together various elements, people, "opening itself up to an *outside*" (my emphasis) (*ibid.*).
3. Minor art is collective: It involves the production of "new kinds of collectivities"; it is also 'future oriented', prophetic in a sense (O' Sullivan 2006: 74), resisting the present by "imagined communities and prototype subjectivities…a diagramming of becoming" (O'Sullivan 2006: 75). This means that minor art extends its influence beyond an already existing audience to a future (or even past) audience; it, in fact, calls its audience into being (*ibid.*).

It is important to note that, on 'non-places as potential sites of creativity', Braidotti reminds us how these may also be zones occupied by immigrants, caught within these "luxurious transit zones" of non-belonging from where they are not able to venture out (1994: 20). They are confined within the very place that is supposed to facilitate movement 'away from' or 'toward'. In this way, the 'place of transition' becomes a regulatory space…a new temporary 'Centre' where those who do not possess freedom of movement fall under the panoptic scrutiny of those who do.

1.1 Making Place through Worship

Jonathan Z. Smith, in opening his series of enquiries into ritual as place, uses a (re)figuration of the Tjilpa myth, a story (not history) that takes place in the mythical 'dream time' within the traditions of the Aborigine Aranda. It tells how the sacred being Numbakulla fashioned a sacred pole, a ritual object that would, after Numbakulla left the earth, be carried along during tribal wanderings as a "cosmic axis", allowing them to "be always in 'their world'" while constantly on the move (Smith 1987: 2). In an earlier work he argues that "society or culture is pre-eminently the construction of significance…through symbolic activity" (Smith 1978: 144).

'Place-making' within the Colour Conferences owes largely to its creativity-fuelled worship ritual which allows place to transcend physical, cultural or other social borders and make holy even the unholy house.[32] 'Worship sessions' are modelled after contemporary popular music concerts: a band performs onstage amid spectacular digital projections, lighting and smoke effects, while the audience members sing, dance, and engage in other worshipful or emotional bodily expressions. Hillsong provides the musicians through Hillsong United (who are flown from Sydney, Australia all over the globe for the Colour Conferences), as well as the music and songs, originally scripted and produced by Hillsong Music Australia (Wagner 2013: 50).[33] [34] Hillsong worship has been proliferated enormously through "the technologically enabled mediascape"—a mythscape where "images and information about spaces" create a new 'place' within the imaginings of its followers (Wagner 2013: 122). It provides, as articulated by Gerardo Marti, "a sonic religious identity, one that is portable and reproducible, whose aesthetics are mimicked with readily available instruments using recordings and YouTube videos as a guide, such that immersion in the tribe is accessible in more and more places, and, via digital reproduction, can be relived again and again" (Marti 2017: 382).

The Colour Conferences become a physical platform for not only making visible the "invisible church" (as concept talked of by Wagner via Tim Rommen (2013: 98)), but also the invisible Divine. Creative visual effects in their often 'larger-than-life' capacity are employed as one way to achieve a subjective 'experience' of what it may be like to come close to God's presence. As described by Andrew Williams, "worship as event-space signals the 'assemblage of heterogeneous materialities and immaterialities: texts, talk, bodies, objects, architectures, atmospheres of mood, smell, touch

[32] In 2017 Cape Town, the Conference was hosted at Emperors' Palace Casino. John Gray (2017a), during one of his sermons states that worship transforms the physical space irretrievably, notwithstanding its secular functions.

[33] Aired during the Colour Conference 2017 in Cape Town, a short documentary 'honours' the wives of the musicians who stay behind during the three week global Colour Conference tour. See hillsongunitedTV. 2018. Colour Conference 2017 Honour Moment-Hillsong UNITED Wives. [O]. Available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q7BmJuBE0lc [2018, September].

[34] Hillsong's worship music has become the lexicon for contemporary Pentecostal worship globally. In 2012 Matthew Wade and Maria Hynes attributed the exponential growth of Hillsong as global church and brand to "the music arm of the organisation", stating that "Hillsong is recognised worldwide for its Christian music and is among the highest selling and most prolific producers of Christian music in the world" (2012: 174). Hillsong, as a "worldwide commercial enterprise", owes its economic success largely to "consumers who are entrained to a particular rhythm of religious sounds" (Marti 2017: 378). In a doctoral thesis exploring the relationship between music and marketing in the pursuit of spiritual significance within the Hillsong movement, Thomas J. Wagner writes on the significance of the 'Hillsong sound' as "both constitutive and reflective of placemaking strategy in which the physical and virtual spaces that the church occupies become mutually referential places in the Hillsong Network" (2013: 144). In this section I will argue that the Colour Sisterhood, while functioning under the broad umbrella of Hillsong, is a constituent that manages to traverse the bounds of the 'Hillsong institution' and assimilate an otherwise unreachable audience through its gender-specificity.

and sound, rhythms and emotion which combine and intersect to generate distinct 'affective atmospheres of the sacred or the divine" (2016: 49).[35]

During celebrity singer and Hillsong worship team member Brooke Ligertwood's impassioned performance of 'Pieces' (written by Amanda Cook), a video insert shows a male lion entering a white-walled interior space, walking across a textured cement floor.[36] Appearing to move across the digital screens as background, the lion becomes a monumental presence, the camera engaging a low, close-range angle so that one at once feels rendered small at its feet, a feeling intensified as the 'ground' shakes at a drop of its paw. In the next scene, the lion's head is shown at close range on the right panel (fig. 1), the music building up to the chorus as he prepares to roar—a roar that at once disintegrates the background behind a glowing cross on the middle pane. As the lion breaths, this background, that at first seems to consist of rows of hundreds of static, glowing digital squares, 'becomes' shards of paper flying up into the air. At that moment, 'confetti guns' release upon the audience gushes of pieces of white paper confetti that imitate the graphic display ahead.

The confetti (printed scriptures) rain down and blow about in torrents—thousands of squares illuminated to white or darkened to black by the play of shadow and light. This effect seems considered in Ligertwood's outfit which was white with a detail of glossy black squares. The stage lighting is synchronised with that of the digital cross, casting intense, splintering white light upon the audience from its base. It finally fades as the chorus fades. [37]

Reiterating this 'presence' of a Godly entity through another traditional Christian motif during the performing of 'Behold', by Joel Houston, is video footage of a white dove (fig. 2), that appears to 'enter' the space from a dark void behind it amid 'explosions' of coloured fragments and clouds. Shown approaching the audience by slowly moving closer with every beat of its wings, the robust, white dove dominates the space while the direct, front angle renders the dove almost tangible.

[35] Stephen Ellingson, who 'defends' contemporary mega-church worship practices as being in service of evangelical pursuits asserts that "the experience of contemporary music in the concert hall-like space of the mega-church creates the possibility of a memorable encounter with the sacred" (2013: 68). Drawing from Robbie B. H. Goh and James B. Twitchell, he argues that "worship in the large, sometimes cathedralesque spaces of mega-church, combining state-of-the-art audio systems, jumbo-trons, light shows and thousands of bodies swaying and singing arms upraised, offers a fundamentally different and better experience of the sacred than most small and mainline worship services" (Ellingson 2013: 68). He writes via Twitchell of the 'genius' of mega-church worship that packages rapture with the "excitement of a rock concert" (Ellingson 2013: 68).

[36] Ligertwood is better known as Brooke Fraser, her maiden and performing name from her secular singing career before Hillsong.

[37] The Lion as a representation of God appears in several Biblical passages. See Hos. 5:14, Hos. 11:10, Hos. 13:8, Jer. 25:38, Lam. 3:10, Job 10:16

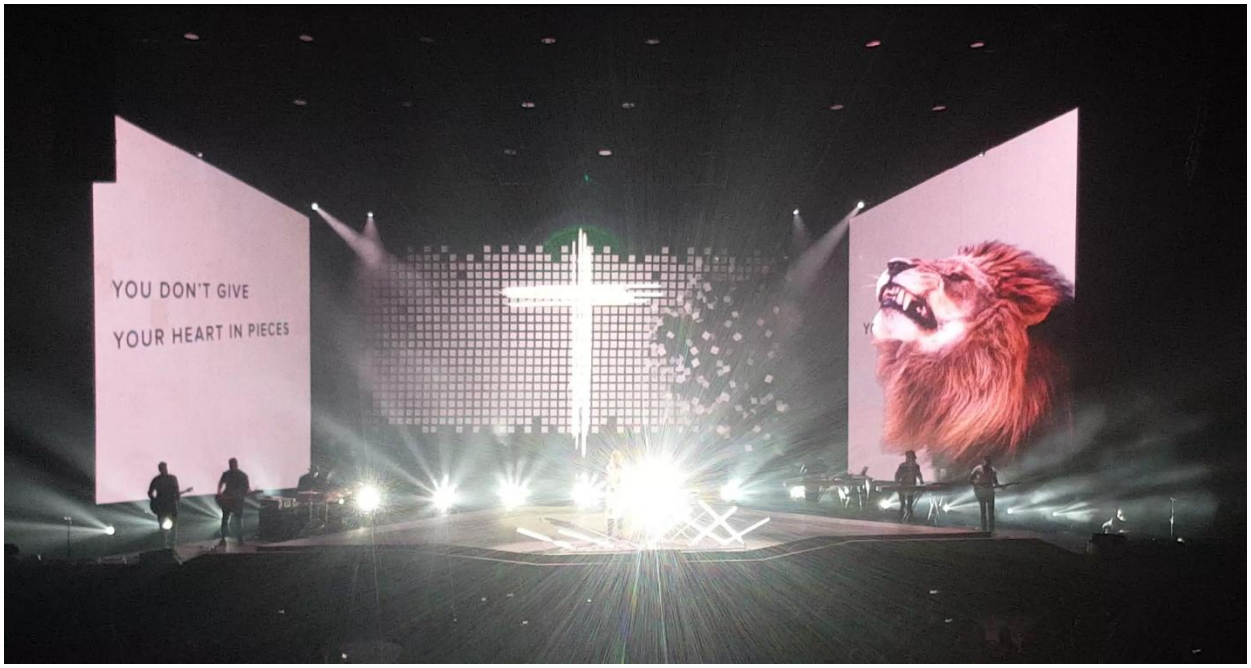

Figure 1: Lucia L. Boshoff, Lion. 2017.
(Captured by author during the 2017 Cape Town Colour Conference)

Figure 2: Lucia L. Boshoff, Dove. 2017.
(Captured by author during the 2017 Cape Town Colour Conference)

While much of the imagery displayed during worship consisted of nonrepresentational contemporary digital art, the familiar religious icons of God as Lion and Holy Spirit as Dove were mimetically, timeously evoked, portrayed as a monumentally realistic 'divine' digital presence. Wagner writes of Hillsong that "the power of a brand's story is derived from its utopian promise...Hillsong's brand promise is the sacred experience" (2013: 86). Marti states that "worship is a guided, event-focused, corporate effort attached to a promise of immediacy to an intimate God, a God whose Spirit-filling empowerment energises even the most mundane activities of work and

family in everyday life" (Marti 2017: 378). He continues that audience members are encouraged to actively 'let go', in order to achieve an "openness to God", which in turn allows the member to access "spiritual empowerment" (2017: 382). This 'spiritual empowerment' 'sacredly charges' the activities of everyday living (*ibid*.).

In different ways, the music itself offers the link between religiosity and the secular landscape. The 'Hillsong sound' has been vital in the brand management of Hillsong (Wagner 2013: 133-134). While being essentially "pop-rock style" (Wagner 2013: 131), it has been described by Hillsong musicians and participants as echoing a "cosmopolitan 'Euro-ness' that is reflective of the diversity of the city's scene" (Wagner 2013: 130-131). Wagner notes how Hillsong negotiates "identity vis-a-vis 'the world'" (Wagner 2013: 22), a notion that induces in 'seekers' (as well as already devoted members) "comfort and awe" (Wade 2015: 665).

'Spiritual seekers' are those who have "little or no attachment" to religious denominations but usually have not "completely rejected the possibility of Christian belief and belonging" (Sargeant 2000; 163). Being from the baby boom generation, the "older forms" of traditional church models apparently do not appeal to 'seekers' and churches therefore innovate in terms of "today's consumerist, therapeutic, and anti-institutional cultural ethos" (Sargeant 2000: 163-164). Ellingson quotes New York Times writer Gustav Niebuhr who writes that mega-church movements make it a point to know the transient tastes of the middle class and to learn from secular institutions that appeal to it (2013: 66-67). In 2018, Brooke Ligertwood, lead singer for Hillsong, won a Grammy Award for her song 'What a Beautiful Name'. Responding to the award, she said that "church songs are the ultimate pop music"; "pop music is music that everyone can connect and get on board with, and that's really the same with worship music".[38]

While turning the "'sensations of Sunday morning' into the experience of Saturday night'" (Ellingson 2013: 68) may serve a spiritual cause, we cannot deny the "marketisation of religion" within the neoliberal world, and its subsequent rendering of the "goods of religion into commodities" (Montemaggi 2013: 109). According to Francesca E. S. Montemaggi, religions are "either the agents or victims of commodification" (*ibid.*). Montemaggi again, takes an apologetic stance, arguing that we ought to see, for example, the music of Hillsong as being subject to "formal commodification", which does not 'devalue' religious life, rather than "substantial commodification", which misinterprets the intentions of religious actors (2013: 109-110). While the defendants of the 'commodification' of worship, in this way, seem to imply that there is a sort of 'pure' motivation at

[38] Bateman, S. 2018. 'Church Songs are the Ultimate Pop Music'—Brooke Fraser. [O]. Available: https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/entertainment/2018/01/church-songs-are-the-ultimate-pop-music-brooke-fraser.html [2018, September]

the core of these practices (or that they ought to be excused in light of the hyper-capitalist society of today) it will become increasingly clear throughout this study that narrated intentions do not always coincide with things 'as they are'.

During the Colour Conferences, worship is infused with an element of femininity, where 'feminine worship' is celebrated as a separate and particularly transformational force. During the Colour Conference in Cape Town, African-American celebrity pastor, comedian and singer, John Gray stated that "there is something about the worship of a woman that changes the atmosphere" (Gray 2017ab: 05:39), and that "when a woman worships, heaven listens" (Gray 2017ab: 13: 50).[39] Writing the feminine into a sub category of worship seems to be done in order to direct 'women's emotionality' into affective spectacle. "Affective labour"—a conscious and deliberate bodily contribution to the worship spectacle (Wade & Hynes 2013), is an important factor in the amplification of the Colour Sisterhood experience, as well as a visible testament to its invisible dynamics. Wade and Maria Hynes note the "primacy and autonomy of the affect—more than simply experiencing "fervour and ecstasy" during worship (Wade & Hynes 2013: 176), the subjective experience is consciously produced on and through the body.

Both of Grays sessions during the 2017 conference centred on the notion of women's "desperate worship" (Gray 2017ab, Gray 2017ac), construed as being consequential to emotional crisis (whether fuelled by 'real life' tragedy or emotionalism per se).[40] 'Women's worship' is compared to the outpouring of expensive perfume on the feet of Jesus by prostitute Mary Magdalene, who wiped it off with her hair, as well as to the woman who menstruated for many years, desperately touching the hem of the garment of Jesus in an act of faith for healing.[41] Women's worship was narrated primarily in service of calling for divine intervention in context of marriages and children (as well as the non-specific, global notion of 'the nations'), with 'favourable' outcomes being relative to the extravagance of the worship performance.

Permeating Gray's messages were calls to spectacularly affective worship—he states that "there is something about a desperation, when you really don't care what people think. When it doesn't matter what the people on your row do, you're still going to go after God with everything" (Gray

[39] Gray, who is an associate pastor at the Lakewood Church in Houston (Hillsong 2016: /contributor/john-gray/) has a long history with Hillsong (Gray 2017ab). His sermons are aired on the Hillsong Channel website, and he appears as guest speaker during the 2018 Hillsong Conference, as well as again at the 2018 Colour Conference.

[40] Gray's performances and how they exaggerate the problematic trope of 'women's irrational emotionality' is discussed in Chapter 4.

[41] See (Holy Bible 1973: Matthew 26: 6-13, Mark 14: 3-9, Luke 7: 36-50, John 12: 1-8) and (Holy Bible 1973: Matthew 9: 18-26, Mark 5: 22-43, Luke 8: 41-56))

2017ab: 15: 05). Later he says that "I believe God wants to take us away from our safe zone...and assuming that we need to be postured in a certain way, because there is something about a desperate sound, a passionate sound, an unbridled sound"(Gray 2017ab: 24: 40). He often, in a loud, charismatic and evangelical style, gives cues on how and when women should express their worship: "I need some women in here that don't mind worshipping, put that Bible down and put your hands together" (Gray 2017ab: 26: 08), and later again "put your Bibles down, stand up where you are, begin to cry out to God, this is not a soft time, this is a desperate time" (Gray 2017ab: 40:20). The audience members respond with a collective cathartic outpouring through clapping, shouts, wailing, raising up hands and dancing. Gray's final performance ended with a particularly emotionally driven collective climax where women ran from their seats to the stage to engage in exuberant bodily acts of worship.

The mise-en-scène of the Colour Conference is designed to make worship as creative, trendy and spectacular as possible. Women in turn 'reward' this effort by their outer display of 'enthusiasm' – "enthusiasm" being "one of the most precious commodities in creative industries" (Bachmann and Wittel in Wade & Hynes 2013: 177). Added to this is an aesthetic that relays worship into the realm of 'the feminine'. In *The Sisterhood*, Houston writes on the need for "a woman's touch" before describing the process of preparing for a "party for…thirty-five thousand girlfriends" (2016: 76). She talks about including an 'element of romance' that speaks to the "the little girl and daughter within [that] needs to be loved, and loved tenderly" (Houston 2016: 73). In this context, she relates, for example, how a giant chandelier made of "thousands and thousands of crystals", along with "dozens of light bulbs hanging off long extension cords with white angel wings attached" was strung from the ceiling of one conference (Houston 2016: 71). Miller recalls a moment during the 2013 Colour Conference when female singers and musicians were suspended from the ceiling in "glass boxes" that "appeared to be diamonds as if partially reinterpreting strip-club culture"—"attractive young women…encased in glass in the shape of a precious gem" (2016: 62).

These examples give us a glimpse of how 'the feminine' is constructed within the movement by blending or alternating a mix of traditional (chandeliers) and contemporary post-feminist ('club' or 'strip club'-like) 'high-status' elements that are associated with femininity within Western consumer culture.[42] However, except for large 'floral' digital backgrounds, the 2017 conference creative worship elements were mostly neutral, rather than gendered in an observable way. Houston's rhetoric on 'romance' (2016: 70), was however, reflected in the choice of Amanda Cook's 'Pieces'

[42] This notion will be discussed more fully in the chapters that follow.

(described above) as “anthem” for “Colour Twenty-17” (Hillsong 2016: /colour17-18/experience-our-guests/). Evoking a lament for ‘lost’ or ‘imperfect’ ‘romantic love’, the lyrics read:

Unreserved, unrestrained
Your love is wild
Your love is wild for me
It isn't shy, it's unashamed
Your love is proud
To be seen with me

You don't give Your heart in pieces
You don't hide Yourself to tease us

Uncontrolled, uncontained
Your love is a fire
Burning bright for me
It's not just a spark
It's not just a flame
Your love is a light
That all the world will see
All the world will see

You don't give Your heart in pieces
You don't hide Yourself to tease us

Your love's not fractured
It's not a troubled mind
It isn't anxious
It's not the restless kind
Your love's not passive
It's never disengaged
It's always present
It hangs on every word we say
Love keeps its promises
It keep its word

It honours what's sacred
'Cause its vows are good
Your love's not broken
It's not insecure
Your love's not selfish
Your love is pure

You don't give Your heart in pieces
You don't hide Yourself to tease us.[43]

Within Pentecostal discourse, the notion of "God as ideal husband" is not unusual (Maddox 2013a: 17), but this worshipful 'anthem', within the context of a women's conference, connects the notion of the fulfilment of unfulfilled, or unfulfilling, 'romantic love' to 'women's worship'. This may be an example of the persistent notion of 'male approval' that, as described in later chapters, informs the 'Colour Sisterhood Femininity'.

Women's 'affective, emotional worship' is posited not only as a "compelling and cathartic" (Marti 2017: 378) experience, but a way to activate change (whether on a personal or more far-reaching—even global level) in a way that surpasses men's worship. The linking of 'women's particularly effective worship' to 'women's emotionality' is reiterative of a pervasive Christian ideology. As Jane E. Soothill writes of Pentecostal ideology, "the inherent nature of women as more emotional than men seems to grant them privileged access to God" (Soothill 2007: 112). In *The Incredible Power of a Praying Woman* (2002) Nicholas Duncan-Williams writes: "Women are emotional beings and when we come before God we come with our emotions, our hearts, our feelings. That is how we touch the heart of God. That kind of prayer brings results" (Duncan-Williams in Soothill 2007: 112).[44]

Houston seems to appreciate that 'the space' evokes emotion, highlighting twice how the conference "ambience was so perfect" that it "reduced many to tears" (2016: 71). Later on she states: "I had no idea that many women have seldom or never been affirmed, romanced or prepared for in this manner" but that this 'romancing' (though the creative devices of the conference) would "lift the imagination of this growing Sisterhood into a new realm of reality and authority—an authority that would, in time, redefine harsh realities into something more lovely and beautiful" (Houston 2016: 73).

[43] Amanda Cook. s.a. *Pieces*. [Song Lyrics]. [O]. Available: https://www.newreleasetoday.com/lyricsdetail.php?lyrics_id=90163 [2018, October]
[44] The belief that 'prayer' is an empowered form of 'women's mobilisation' is discussed in Chapter 3.

The value of the temporary physical space of conference as 'conducive' of 'women's worship' is expressed continually within the marketing material for Colour Conference. As an example, the 2018 Colour Conference printed invitation (handed out to 2017 conference goers) opens to the charge "Experience the Room", printed largely in bold. A paragraph follows that reads:

> There's just something about being in the room. Thousands of women 'united in friendship, vision, and cause' unlock the atmosphere and unleash the miraculous. It attracts the felt presence of God…and what is felt is irresistible.[45]

At the same time, the Colour Sisterhood's extraordinary promotional reach sets the movement up as a monolith of women's worship at a representational level. Women are therefore offered a sense of 'empowerment through worship' within the Colour Sisterhood context that they may feel they cannot experience in their usual church settings, or in their everyday lives.[46] [47]

Reiterated in Houston's statement is the 'connective' aspect of worship within the setting of the conference. As argued in the introduction to this chapter, worship as social activity may create a sense of belonging and self-worth. "However anonymous a person may be, they are part of this group, this family, and this house" (Marti 2017: 382.). "Hearing place" (2013: 117), as described by Wagner, may serve as binding factor for the "complex associational web of people and places that constitutes the socio-cultural entity" (2013: 118), creating a site "where the unwelcome will feel welcome… racial lines will blur and the rich and poor will come together" (Sargeant 2000: 195). Smith writes that "the fundamental symbolic and social question" of the place where one stands is "the question of the character of the place": "once an individual or culture has expressed its vision of its place, a whole language of symbols and social structure will follow" (Smith 1978: 141). The symbols and ritual practices may therefore offer a way to traverse the variegated plateaus of

[45] Houston, B. 2017. *Wind in Her Sails: Colour Twenty-18*. Printed Brochure received by author during the 2017 Cape Town Colour Conference. 29 April 2017

[46] Marti starts his inquiry into Hillsong worship with an anecdote of his aunt who, while not being a "Pentecostal spirit-filled Christian" (however, a Christian nonetheless), expressed a longing to attend the Hillsong concert and worship in their style (2017: 377-378).

[47] In one of the Colour Sisterhood 'documentaries' (shared during conferences as well as on their webpage) Cassandra Langton describes how a South African woman from a township in Cape Town sold her shoes in order to afford to attend the Colour Conference. In context of this she states: "So, uh, of course guys we bought her new shoes. But as we **create**, I think about her, I think about people who are willing to give the very shoes off their feet to be where Jesus is. They want so desperately to encounter Him, so I don't want to waste a moment, I don't want to waste an ounce of creativity, I don't want to waste a moment in worship, I don't want to waste words in videos. Because she gave everything...she broke her jar, so she could be where Jesus was" (Langton in The Making of A Story 2017: 20: 04).While the next chapter looks at how the conference may exclude women from lesser privilege, I would like to call attention to how the message here seems to suggest that Divinity is best encountered within the space of Conference.

historical and daily experience as well as race, class and gender, offering a unifying 'place' beyond these divides.

However, there seems to be a paradox in how seeker-friendly 'worship' is narrated as "intentionally" tailored "for the person who wants to remain anonymous and merely observe" (Thumma & Travis 2007: 149) (in other words, 'be entertained') and the apparent unifying as well as deterritorialising aspect of worship—especially in the context of the conference as a fleeting annual occurrence. In order to render worship as 'entertainment', Scott Thumma and Dave Travis write that the "performance value of worship presentation is very important", as is following a "down-to-the-second" production in relaying the "innovations in music, sound and video projection, lighting and other factors that have been adapted from popular culture and then baptised for use in the church" (2007: 149-150). Rather than radical nomadic deterritorialisation, this reads as a move from one dominant territory ('traditional' church practice—the word 'traditional' being highly ambiguous) to another (Western popular culture)—a migration. As we shall see throughout this study, often, the space of 'transit' between 'spiritual teaching' and, to use Sargeant's term metaphorically, the "idioms of everyday speech" (Sargeant 2000: 178) as well as the nature of the conference itself, emulates how non-place may create "neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude and similitude" (Augé 1995: 103).

As an example, while Gray's sermons (as well as Houston's *The Sisterhood*) effectually relayed 'women's spectacular unbridled worship' as a normative, obligatory action construed as 'empowerment', (and while this may very well be a form of empowerment) we shall see later how this extraordinary 'spiritual empowerment' is bestowed upon women whilst true empowerment is withheld. In other ways, the firm grip the Colour Sisterhood maintains over its creative expression as well as every other aspect means that there are few, if any opportunities for 'women's voices' to be truly heard within its discourse, even though the 'feminist' notion of 'giving ordinary women voice' is regularly invoked. This assertion becomes thematic within this thesis, and is true for the showcasing of talents via the performances as well as for dialogue that continually offers a very one sided experience (in other words, from the viewpoint of the movement itself or its founder).

While worship and 'the creative' may navigate difference—a Deleuzoguattarian 'refrain' that territorialises a constantly shifting, deterritorialising territory, the transformational potential is latent within the 'crack', the opening up of the circle to an 'outside' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 311).[48]

[48] Deleuze and Guattari describe the notion of 'the refrain' *in A Thousand Plateaus*, as a rhythm, song, a lullaby, or child's game as a means of drawing a circle around an "uncertain or fragile centre"—a way for warding off fear, of making sense of chaos, or for strengthening oneself for the tasks ahead (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 310-312). "The forces of chaos are kept outside as much as possible, and the interior space

Deleuze and Guattari write of matters of expression that they "must be considered not only in relation to their aptitude to form motifs and counterpoints (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 331) but that the "territorial assemblage is inseparable from lines or coefficients of deterritorialisation, passages and relays toward other assemblages" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 333). Again, we may consider how, in essence, worship, through a rejection of the "Cartesian split between mind and body", may shape "the capacity of the body to be affected in ways that can produce an alternative psychogeography, ways of being and experiencing the world" (Williams 2016: 47).

However, when considering the broader 'institutionalised' category of 'Hillsong Worship', or perhaps now 'Colour Sisterhood Feminine Worship' one cannot deny what Maddox identifies as the 'dominionist' aspect of the movement(s), and consequently its rituals. Dominionist theology asserts a take-over by Christian institutions of political and everyday life (Maddox 2013a). Marti notes how the "shape of the music—the power ballad, the war cry" resources "the enactment of a strategic religious identity" (2017: 382). Similarly the imagery of war and apocalyptic battles, and the Colour Sisterhood as the "warrior daughters" of a King (Houston 2016. Maddox 2013a), that infuse the rhetorical representations of the Colour Sisterhood seem to speak of notions of global take-over (whether on a political, subjective, or socio-cultural level).[49] Houston (2016) often encourages women to 'take up authority'. While a notion of influencing 'the world' may be in line with the Pentecostal evangelical charge, the Hillsong movement, as well as the Colour Sisterhood movement, seem to be established as having received the sole divine mandate to 'lead the charge' in certain areas. In terms of the global impact of Hillsong's 'worship music', for example, Brian Houston implies that only Hillsong is "anointed" to write worship music, and continues to dissuade churches to pursue this endeavour, stating that when "they start writing their own songs, singing their own songs, it becomes their worship, and to be honest, their worship goes backwards" (Houston 2016: 05:40).[50]

Creating a new category for 'worship' imbued with a gendered dynamic may be a subjective mechanism for amassing a group of participants from a very specific but large segment of society—many of whom might ordinarily fall beyond Hillsong's circle of influence and reach. If the

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protects the germinal forces of a task to fulfil or a deed to do. This involves an activity of selection, elimination and extraction, in order to prevent the interior forces of the earth from being submerged, to enable them to resist, or even to take something from chaos across the filter or sieve of the space that has been drawn" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 311).

[49] Houston writes of the movement, for example, that "the daughters were awake and there was movement in the camp. The troops were finding the reason for their existence, and the women Jesus had been waiting for were literally assembling" (Houston 2016: 113).

[50] The Colour Sisterhood, as expanded on in the final chapter, similarly posits itself as a feminine movement that is predestined to fulfil apocalyptic prophesy (Houston 2016), and therefore is above and beyond other 'women's movements'.

contemporary Pentecostal mega-church movement can be likened to a "worship mall" (Spinks 2010), then one may expect that new commodities will be introduced in keeping with trends and tastes. A monopoly on 'women's worship' may be a valuable asset, not only for the movement itself, but as yet another product of its parent institution, Hillsong.

Of course, the question remains—what if I do not worship? Or worship in this way? Smith states that "the creation of a new ritual site is always an intriguing process. For, from the standpoint of ritual, novelty may result in a functional gain, but...an ideological loss. If the former allows the freedom to innovate, the latter may result in a lack of resonance" (1987: 75).

Hillsong seems well versed in bridging divides between old and new religious expressions of worship, as well as secular and sacred experiences of music, setting itself up, as Smith writes of the establishment of Constantinople, as a metaphorical "new Rome" (Smith 1987: 75). Having successfully ushered in the 'Hillsong sound' as the standard for worship music world-wide, dissonance is eased through a mimetic replacement in its narratives as well as visual and musical expressions. Brian Houston, writes on the success of Hillsong worship that "the message is sacred, but the methods must change"—"there is a beautiful reverence that comes from singing the old hymns penned by Wesley and Newton, and yet there is something powerful about new songs and new anthems that are speaking to the here-and-now" (Houston in Hillsong 2016: /collected/blog/2013/06/creating-a-worshipful-environment/#.W6NX084zaUk).[51] At the same time the familiar, 'world-affirming' element of the music (often centred on 'the self' rather than on the sacred), may facilitate a homogeneous dynamic among those familiar with popular musical genres.[52] The 'feel good' vibes of the songs could easily extend into the secular realm of self-affirmation, while, true to Pentecostalism, not denying these their 'evangelical potential'. More than this, however, the 'Hillsong sound', is a 'learned sound'—the whole orchestra of elements (the marketing, resources, happenings and performances) playing together across the physical and virtual world to usher in a new "normative language" (Wagner 2013: 100).

While maintaining its 'seeker-friendly' character, the narration by Gray of mandatory 'spectacular' feminine worship, may also serve as a mechanism for separation. Williams describes how "the

[51] As seen in this chapter within context of the Colour Conference, the Hillsong design strategy includes assimilating contemporary artistic innovation alongside traditional religious iconography within its ritual spaces and worship practices.

[52] In her comment on Christian music being the "ultimate pop music", Ligertwood continues that "pop music is music that everyone can connect to and get on board with, and that's really the same with worship music. Ideally, it's music that you can come in to a church and sing, whether you're mechanic or a singer or a doctor or a stay-at-home mum, that you would find a connection point in those lyrics that uplifts you, connects you to God and helps you on your journey". (Ligertwood in Bateman 2018).

deliberate design of worship space can differently open out capacities and affective atmospheres of the sacred, while they simultaneously circumscribe such capacities because of expected outcomes and contrived participatory 'manners'—routinised behaviours, attitudes and meanings" (2016: 49). He continues that "Pentecostal worship praxis claims a set of participatory 'manners' which centre on distinctly somatic ecstatic performances of effusive singing, dancing, healing and speaking in tongues" (Williams 2016: 49). We need to consider how these 'participatory manners' are defined (as by Gray) within the context of, as Wade notes of Hillsong, the "panopticon-like surveillance [that] prevails among the [Hillsong] population, encouraging a self-regulation of behaviour" (Wade 2016: 663). Henri Lefebvre talks about "walls, enclosures and facades" being constructed as both a "scene (where something takes place) and an obscene area to which everything that cannot or may not happen on the scene is relegated" (Lefebvre 1974: 36). In this way boundaries may sometimes become "bulwarks against chaotic forces", against those who are "not like us" (Smith 1978: 136-137). In the upcoming chapters I explore how the 'feminine' within the movement is defined and represented within definite regulatory bounds that rely on a dichotomising 'Us' and 'Them'.

1.2 'The Creative' as Signifier for the Desires of the Divine, and of Houston

'The creative' manifests strongly within the movement as a theoretical 'ideal' or philosophical construct. More than artistic expression (performance, photography, music, design or other forms of art), it is summoned throughout its visual and narrative discourses as signifying entity: at times as witness, at others, evangelist. 'The creative' as expression, process and 'moment of inspiration' is sometimes construed as a metaphor, and at other times as a physical expression for the desires, not only of the movement, but of God. 'The creative' therefore becomes a virtual 'place' where 'the divine' may be accessed and given shape.

Heavenly inspiration manifesting in 'the creative' is channelled through Houston, who is narrated as the singular vessel for the revelation of God's desires for the movement. Often, throughout her book *The Sisterhood* (2016), she describes her divine encounters in terms of 'whispers', where she, at various times, experiences instructions around creative expression for Godly 'mandates' within the movement. In *The Sisterhood*, an autobiographical account of the history of the movement and of Houston, Houston describes the process of creating the (first) invitation for the Colour Conference:

> I felt as if God had seeded the creative look and feel of the next invitation of what would be our third Colour gathering. I'm labouring these details because the brochure invitations were playing a huge role in helping women to understand the heart and vision of what this thing was about…images of how to photoshoot and craft the following year's invitation suddenly

> popped into my head. I don't believe it was just a bright idea on my part—I believe it was a bright idea on God's part (2016: 44).

The online invitation for the Colour Conference 2017 states that "as always, our only desire is to capture the heart of heaven for the women that gather each year" (Houston in Hillsong 2016: /colour/capetown/). Continually, divine inspiration is coupled to details, even those seemingly trivial as the use of 'colourful confetti' (albeit "oceans and oceans" of it shot into the air by confetti guns), to which Houston attributes both "fun and healing" (followed by relating an attendee's account of such healing). The confetti, having become a much-anticipated part of the opening of Colour Conferences, is portrayed as having a 'higher calling' by being likened to God's creativity. Houston writes: "Of course, if you think about it, He actually paints the heavens with colour and wonder every single day" (Houston 2016: 74-75).

In this way, a pattern of 'divine cause and creative effect' permeates the story related throughout the *The Sisterhood*, as well as the movement's online platforms. Whether it is a choice in corporate gifts (Houston 2016: 78-84, 96-100), setting and ambiance (Houston 2016: 70-71) or location choice for photography (Hillsong 2017: Colour Brochure).[53] Because 'the creative' is seen as a location for the orchestration of divine will, ordinary objects may become supernaturally charged. An example is the Colour Conference invitation. Continually promoted by Houston as 'more than just a piece of paper' (Houston 2016, 2017) the physical, printed version incites a collective and emotional fervour for the object which becomes physically expressed.[54] This can be seen in, for example, the collected archival blog from the 2016 Colour Conference, where just fewer than half the 119 photographs depict conference-goers engaging with the printed version of the invitation; they are mulled over, raised up, embraced, prayed over and posed with. The invitation, as thematically implemented creative entity, therefore seems to be a very palpable mechanism for concretizing collective desire—

[53] Houston, in a chapter dedicated to the naming of the project, attribute the name 'Colour' to her own 'discovery', saying, on creativity, and the name in particular, that while "inspired from above", we need to "step out and trust our own instincts" (2016: 38). She writes that "our Father in heaven leaves the creativity up to us, a paintbrush in hand and more or less says, "Okay, start colouring and let's see what emerges on the canvas"" (Houston 2016: 38). Following these statements, Houston feels able to "confess" that the name 'Colour' (which was in the first few years, 'Colour Your World') was derived from a phrase she read while paging through a Vogue magazine. A possible contradiction to 'Godly Inspiration', is quickly eased by stating that "God was quietly overshadowing each little step and flick of the page" (Houston 2016: 38-39).

[54] The annual Colour Conference invitations metamorphosise between virtual renderings (webpages and online videos) and full colour glossy or matt publications distributed among the thousands of attendees, until finally laid to rest enshrined in a pageable e-magazine format in an online gallery. This gallery, except for a collage of photographs, are used to visually narrate the movement on its online 'history' page (see Hillsong 2016:/colour/history/). I would like to point out how, in the absence of narrative here, the e-invitations therefore seem to stand in as display pieces of what the previous conferences aimed to achieve—in other words, its 'desires' rather than its 'outcomes'(Hillsong 2016: Colour/history).

a ritual object. It is, in a sense, the unexpected pièce de résistance of the movement's creative endeavours.

The invitation also gives us another example of how, within the movement, 'the desires of God' is often narrated alongside 'the desires of Bobbie Houston'. As briefly noted above, the creative process is said to want to "capture in film and photography something of God's eternal heart toward us" (Houston in Hillsong 2016: /colour/capetown/). At the same time, it states that 'goals' are: "to visually capture Bobby's heart, regarding the journey and fields" (*ibid.*). Another example is when Langton tells how "the arts" as "showcase" for the character of God, is the "platform for Bobbie to springboard off" (Langton in *The Making of a Story* 2016: 21:20).

Houston's 'motherhood' is undeniably a strong feature within the movement, and is (and was during the 2017 Cape Town conference) often placed in the foreground.[55] [56] While Houston seems to be wary of criticism on her role, stating, on starting the conference that: "I had no natural ambition to do this" (Houston 2017), her 'authorship', or 'ownership' is established both narratively and visually, to the point where I felt little seems to happen within the movement without being drawn back to Houston.[57]

Houston's presence during the 2017 Colour Conference formed a much celebrated part of the proceedings, the guest speakers taking time during their performances to honour her. Pastor and singer John Gray, for example, opens his sermon by stating, "I want to first give honour to the visionary, what a spectacularly phenomenal women, Pastor Bobbie Houston…can we celebrate her?" He continues, addressing her directly: "Because you said yes, women are getting free, people are getting saved, families are getting restored, because you said yes" and also, "I celebrate you Pastor Bobbie for your beauty, commitment, and the way you have championed the local church" (Gray: 2017a). Lucinda Dooley opens her sermon by acknowledging Houston: "I would like to honour the legacy of my senior pastor", before going on to 'honouring' the "King of Kings" and "Lord of Lords"

[55] In *The Sisterhood,* Houston describes her role within the Colour movement as being the "mother in the house" having taken over leadership in what was then women's Bible study groups out the hands of "some lovely willing women" (2016: 21).

[56] In an interview with JOY! magazine, Houston writes; "I often feel like an old mother hen...What is the mark of a maternal heart? It is to love and to cherish, to protect and nurture, and raise and release her offspring to greater exploits than herself" (Houston 2007).

[57] One example of the manner in which Houston's authorship of the movement is fixed is through her signature that prevails throughout the online but also written content. Written as first-person accounts, most of the narratives are autographed in one of the following ways: "Always and Forever, Bobbie Houston", Love You Heart and Soul, See You Soon, Bobbie Houston", "With love and affection, Bobbie" or a simple copyright "©2009 Bobbie Houston" (Hillsong 2017: Brochure, Hillsong 2017: Colour, Hillsong 2017: Colour Cape Town, Hillsong 2017:Colour/blog/2014/05/i-am-sisterhood-declaration/).

(Dooley 2017a).[58] Later on, Dooley emotionally attributes her life's success to her encounter with Houston.

However, what seemed to exemplify Houston's authorship in what is perhaps a very literal manner was the extent to which her autobiographical works, *The Sisterhood* (2016) and its sequel, *Stay the Path* (2017) were continually promoted and referenced, both on and off stage. I felt that these books, in the extent that they feature as representations of the author—containing and disclosing the words, the history, and the desires of Houston (and very little outside of this)—can be read as an avatar, in a sense, of Houston herself. [59]

The design of the lobby space, the area entered prior to the opening of what are referred to as the 'inner doors' of the conference, are centred around large renderings of the book covers and displays, many on which Houston's image appears. Before the conference commenced, the 'volunteers' (men and women from the Hillsong churches both locally and abroad) were attending a 'rally' within this space, and a woman was addressing them over a loudspeaker, igniting fervour for the task ahead by passionately 'preaching' verses of encouragement written by Houston in *Stay the Path* while the book was held on high. Once the 'inner doors' opened the two books continued to enjoy a place in the proverbial and physical spotlight, with few of the performances not succumbing to reference to the books that seemed to enjoy a permanent place on stage. Houston especially, while making the statement during the proceedings that "I have no ambition to be an author", talks about the works often, and in being asked a question during one of the Sisterhood Sessions on the aims of the movement implores the audience to "read the book", stating that the "spirit, heart and soul [of the movement]…are captured in the book" (Houston 2017). During her first performance Houston opens by asking of the book: "Has anyone had a chance to read it? Yeah, just lie and tell me that you did? Because I went through a hell of a lot of, like trouble to write this! I actually went to hell and back to write this! No, I'm only joking, actually" (Houston 2017b: 03:19). Dooley likewise passionately incites the audience to "go and purchase that book!" (Dooley 2017) .The (omni)presence of 'the books' continue to be tangible within the movement's online platforms, featuring not only through advertisements but more visibly as photographs where conference-goers are shown purchasing and lovingly holding them.

[58] The Colour Sisterhood initiative (as part of the broader Hillsong movement) and its founder Houston appear to be emphasised as 'cohesive force' within the movement, even more so than 'submission' to God or Christ.
[59] The Christian culture industry, and its recent boom within mega-church movements, has, as described briefly in the introduction, produced its own array of consumables (music, books, purchasable sermons, podcasts) (Wagner 2013). While these 'resources' are meant to be "educational" in various ways, Wagner writes how they inevitably allowed consumers to "see the world through Hillsong-tinted evangelical Christian lenses" (Wagner 2013: 152). Their presence plays an important part in concretising authorship.

The Colour Sisterhood movement is inextricably linked to Houston, her biography and desires, and her image as commodified entity. 'Celebritised' representations of its leaders are important within Hillsong (Wagner 2013), a trend that reflects the wider mega-church culture's affiliation with celebrity culture (Spinks 2010). Similarly, Bobbie Houston is undeniably the star of the Colour Sisterhood show. The manner in which 'the creative' is bound to the desires of Houston (which relays to her and husband's 'larger' enterprise, Hillsong), and narrated as the desires of God, essentially draws a very tight circle around the movement , its expressions, goals and what it allows 'in' as part of its representations. As Braidotti notes via Deleuze of 'icons', or the "recognisable visual commodity", they are "a way of organising power"; they create and control a territory (2015). She writes that "faciality" "engenders the self as a brand, it engenders the nation as a territory, it naturalizes them" (Braidotti 2015). Interestingly, Houston seems to very literally recognise herself as a territoriliasing entity (albeit, in her words 'hilariously') when she writes that, in answer to a divine call, "I volunteered myself, I volunteered my church, I volunteered the women of Hillsong, I volunteered my nation—I volunteered Australia!" (2016: 110). Braidotti notes how icons of the past were "religious in origin and function", and how they are today "dominated by celebrities of popular culture" that continue to fulfil a mystical, totemic function that is religious by nature (2015). Interestingly, Houston inhabits both the religious and quasi-religious positions of 'being icon' simultaneously. She is on the one hand, the 'face of the movement', while also on the other the divine vessel for realising its heaven-ordained purpose.

Because the movement is so narrowly associated with one person (and that personhood is endowed as the 'divinely chosen one'), a conundrum seems to arise between maintaining authorship and control, and playing at willingness to allow the circle to 'rupture'—open up to an 'outside', as called for by a movement propagating 'empowerment'. As an example, the feminist notion of 'giving ordinary women voice' (discussed more broadly in Chapter 2) is a recent catchphrase within the movement's marketing and performances. This notion is proliferated by offering space for 'stories' told by different women in the form of short documentaries aired at conference, as well as a large collection of clickable links opening up to short biographical accounts by different contributors. [60] During the screening of video inserts of the 'stories' at the 2017 Cape Town Colour Conference proceedings, Houston, states: "We begin to showcase the stories of just, everyday girls like you and

[60] Other than on the *Invitation* page, the *Stories* page hosts 15 clickable accounts. While on The Sisterhood Foundation page, four are headlined "Stories", five links described as "Testimonies" lead to over 30 accounts, either written or in video format, by various authors. Of the stories encountered on the webpage, some were included as short films showed during the 2017 Colour Conference proceedings, while 'panel discussions' during the conference's 'Sisterhood Sessions' offered a glimpse into the lives of a selected group of 'everyday' women and men.

I...if you went online, there are about 40 other stories of everyday girls like you to be inspired by…within this brochure I talked about the everyday girls" (Houston 2017). However, finding among these 'stories' any without a direct relationship to Houston, the Colour Conference or Hillsong, proved almost impossible, most authors citing present or previous work or voluntary positions at the various Hillsong institutions (Hillsong 2016: /colour/stories/).[61]

Of the nomadic endeavour, Braidotti argues that adding of voices—a 'collective narrative'—allows for a "collective political movement" (Braidotti 1994a: 37).[62] 'Assemblages of narrative' is a powerful tool within the project of difference—a means of reaching beyond the 'self' toward a diversity of voices, experiences, histories and dialogues. The narrative element, being "part of our being" (Fischer 1984: 272), allows for "a fluid function of connectivity involving an internal cohesion (autopoeisis, or the production of a territory) but also an external openness (…a deterritorialisation)" (O'Sullivan 2006: 27-28). "The connection with an outside is crucial" (O'Sullivan 2006: 27-28). Fischer writes that "the stories that we tell one another enable us to observe not only our differences, but also our commonalities, and in such might be able to reform the notion of 'public'…communal identity" (1984: 280). In terms of deterritorialisation of the 'major language', we can see this as an aspect multiplicity: a rhizomatic project allowing the 'process', or 'the creative' to be defined by multiple revelations. It becomes an open-ended dialogue.

Regrettably, as we shall see throughout this thesis, the power of this dialogue within the movement seems to be subdued through a kind of Bakhtinian monologism where all the flows of desire seem relegated to serve the desire of the 'author', or 'authority'. Where dialogism essentially allows consciousness (desire) to be the product of the voices (and desires) of multiple 'others' (Bakhtin 1984), employing a monologic approach denies these voices their 'otherness': "another person remains wholly and merely an object of consciousness, and not another consciousness…Monologue pretends to be the ultimate word" (Bakhtin 1984: 292-293). Rather than advocating multiplicity, then, the voices of others as well as 'the creative' seem to offer few lines of flight away from the desires of 'the One', whether of Houston herself or the broader institution of Hillsong and its brand.

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[61] These short narratives are described as a "tiny snapshot into the world of your sisters", that aims to show how "every-day women" are also "found in their calling" (Houston in Hillsong 2016: colour/capetown). This section is orchestrated through large black and white photographs of four women, followed by clickable links that open pages to their 'stories', written either as autobiographical accounts or interviews. The subsequent accounts relate something of these women's everyday lives as well as of how they 'serve' in their communities or abroad in some way.

[62] Braidotti asserts that by allowing others to speak through her text, she dethrones a "'transcendental narcissism' of the philosophising 'I'…actualising the noncentrality of the 'I' to the project of thinking" (1994: 37-38).

The broader implication of the undermining of voices in the context of South African femininities and feminism will be discussed in the chapter that follows.

On the attachment to "certain forms of dominant faces", Braidotti states that "feminist criticism is one of the conceptual detox cures to help us rid ourselves of…the appeal of certain icons" (Braidotti 2014: 22:30). She continues that:

> There is a sort of positive and creative tension between the identitarian claims—the modes of identification we can have with certain faces, and the resistance to their territorialising power...to their power to manipulate and control our psychic self-representations. There is a tension between recognisable faces and anonymous masses. There is a tension between icons that fix you and movements that liberate you—lines of flight that set you moving. A tension between the high visibility and the potential despotism of the 'One' and the facelessness of the multitude (*ibid*.).

Conclusion

In this chapter I looked at how creative expression, ritual and 'the creative' as ontological, signifying entity relate to the creation of 'place' (physical, virtual and subjective) within the Colour Sisterhood, while questioning whether these elements offer transformative possibilities. The introduction suggest via the work of Braidotti on the post-secular turn, and Kapferer and Guattari on ritual practice as subjectivating forces, that women's spiritual rituals and ritual spaces may serve as deterritorialising and unifying agents. I also touch on how, within academic and other literature, the ritual practices of Hillsong have been scrutinised (by critics as well as defendants of the movement and these practices) as being related to its consumerist endeavours. The introduction concludes, following Simon O' Sullivan's application of Guattari and Deleuze's work on minor literature to art practice, with a framework against which the transformative potential of art, or 'the creative' may be measured. In order for 'the creative' to be revolutionary, it must find creative ways of operating within 'the major', it must reach out beyond the self to connect different 'regimes', and it must produce new kinds of collectivities.

Drawing on Smith's understanding of how ritual functions in place-making, the first section explores how 'worship' functions as place-making strategy that follows from the creative environment, but in turn, as described by Wade and Hynes, creates the environment through the affective and spectacular bodily expressions of worship by the participants. Hillsong's worship rituals have been seen as a means of accessing and transforming subjectivities, of creating new ties that triumph over normal divides of space, culture and background, as well as a means of 'enchanting' the brand and

its capitalist endeavours. While the Colour Sisterhood's worship is Hillsong 'born and led', the performances by John Gray during the 2017 Colour Conference in Cape Town suggested that 'women's worship', which is defined in terms of intense emotional toil, is a separate and highly transformational 'act'. The notion that the Colour Conference is designed to be particularly conducive of 'women's worship' and the impassioned call to partake in such worship may offer a sense of belonging and empowerment for participants while strengthening the 'brand'. At the same time it leaves me wondering whether it does not also serve to 'separate' as part of the strategy to establish a femininity that relies on dichotomising 'Us' and 'Them' (discussed in the next chapter).

The second part looks at how 'the creative' itself becomes 'place' by being narrated as the seat of heavenly desire. Sacred mandate, fulfilled through creative expression, is accessed, interpreted and authored by Houston, which means that her own desires are inevitably inextricable from the shape, the goals and the outcomes of the movement. As much as Houston's desires give shape to 'place' within the Colour Sisterhood, Houston as icon infuses its various 'spaces' (whether in presence, image or word). For the movement to move 'to an outside' beyond the limits imposed by the experiences and beliefs of one person, therefore becomes a challenge.

Braidotti states that, in a feminist context, nomadicism means "building footbridges"--"the invention of new ways of relating" (Braidotti 1994a:93). However, nomadic space, (as giving rise to nomads, as much as being made by nomadic activity), is not about being transfixed in an 'inward look' from the limits, but is about an outward-bound continual process of 'creating' (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 348). While 'women's worship' as ritual may traverse and bring together different 'regimes', the importance of emanating (or, in the case of Hillsong 'pioneering') a highly-orchestrated neo-Pentecostal world-affirming style as inculturating practice also denies culture. As an example, one could re-imagine the Colour Conference as offering a wonderfully diverse platform for showcasing some of South Africa's many (and often world-renowned) Gospel choirs or singers; however, resources are instead employed to keep the conference as 'generic' as possible.[63] The cultural impact of mega-style worship practices and aesthetics within the context of South Africa and its women begs for further analysis, but will have to wait for another time.

[63] While one African children's choir made a brief appearance at the Colour Conference 2017 in Cape Town, space (whether on-stage or virtual) seems to be given to 'local' voices only by means of symbolically 'including' 'Other'. This is a central argument for Chapter 2.

Chapter 2

Found in the Field: Examining the Colour Sisterhood's Discourse on 'Difference' within the South African Context

Introduction

For the women's movement in South Africa, non-political forms of organisations offer crucial platforms where feminist ideologies as well as strategies for bringing about change can be fostered (Hassim 2004). However, Hassim asserts that if such organisations are to be transformative within (South African) society, they need to embrace a distinct ideology that emphasises the mobilisation of women in transforming the power relations, not only of gender, but also of race and class (2004: 4-5, 16). The notion of 'triple oppression' needs to be acknowledged as a fundamental issue within South African feminism (Hassim and Walker 1992: 81-84). However, we need to be weary of a reductionist view that fixates difference to a *naturalized* rhetoric of gender/race/class divisions. Instead, feminism needs to embrace a wider dialogue that takes into account how further social divisions and representations operate within communities (Braidotti 1994a: 161-162)—'difference' as "the complex interplay of differing levels of experience" (Braidotti 1994a: 178). Social developments such as "ethnicity, origin and urban or rural residence" or ideological imperatives, and how women relate to these, will influence the construction of communities, and thereby women's 'citizenship' (Yuval-Davis 1997: 4).[64] Power relations or historical conflicts among "different groups" therefore also need to be articulated to avoid a "singular politics of difference" (Jakobsen 1998: 9).

The South African context demands that feminist consciousness reflects an understanding that there are many levels of women's experience and that these cannot be loosened from their historical antecedents (Hassim 2004, Manicom 2005, Segalo 2015). Collective movements, then, in fostering feminist subjectivities, need to provide the "linkages between different 'plateaus' of experience" in creating "points for...knowledge as resistance" (Braidotti 1994a: 179). Braidotti speaks about an "epistemological community as legitimating agent" and the importance of effecting change within the "sociomaterial frames of reference" within the project of transformation (1994: 179-180). For such a movement to effectively: 1) produce feminist subjectivities, and 2) create points for activation, the imparting of the 'knowledge of difference'—"the recognition of both the sameness and the otherness of the other woman" is imperative—in fact, it is the starting point (Braidotti 1994a: 188).

[64] Briefly defined as "political space and agency" (Manicom 2005: 40), understanding the ambiguities of what 'citizenship' for women entitles is an ongoing challenge for feminism, particularly within the historically and socially complex situation in South Africa (2005: 26-34).

In this chapter I question whether the Colour Sisterhood movement, as a non-political, global women's solidarity network, temporarily inserted upon the South African landscape as the Colour Conference, gives recognition to issues of difference, especially within a local context. This would call for a conscious affirmation that gender issues are not dividable from its race and class counterparts as well as from historical experience. It would also mean that further levels of difference are recognised and that the imparting of the 'knowledge of difference', without falling back onto problematic dichotomising representations, plays a key role in the formation of feminist subjectivities. I focus on the 2017 Cape Town Colour Conference as well as the 2017 conference marketing material and its visual and narrative expressions of 'difference' and 'sameness', belonging and exclusion. I question whether or not visual and narrative space is created for conversations to rise around these issues as well as the historical and present experiences of women in South Africa.

Keeping in mind that "images do not carry meaning, or 'signify' on their own", but rather "gain in meaning when they are read in context...across a variety of texts and media" (Hall 1997: 232), the themes in this chapter should be read against those already discussed, and at the same time as preparing the way for those in the chapters that follow. An important question here is whether or not this movement aims to make itself relevant to the South African situation as separate from, while still being part of, its overarching 'global' narrative.

2.1 The First Sisterhood Session: A Conversation Regulated to Serve the 'One'

The key speakers at the 2017 Cape Town Colour Conference were Houston, Lucinda Dooley, who co-pastors the Cape Town branch of Hillsong church, and John Gray. During her first performance, entitled 'It's a Movement' (2017) Dooley uttered a bold cry: "Don't let anyone tell you that Africa is in trouble…this is the day for Africa! How will we change a city, a nation, or a continent if we are fighting amongst ourselves, if we cry over what each one has and what we don't have…continue to complain and speak badly about each other?!". The crowd roared exuberantly as Gray, having earlier called for the laying down of "our colour, race and background", commanded: "Stop trying to be them ['somebody else'], and embrace your colour, embrace your texture, embrace your unique individuality!" (Gray 2017a).

While incitements like these, rendered however passionately (and to much applause), may appear to promote a 'moving forward' toward social cohesion, they arguably did little more during Dooley's and Gray's performances than evoke emotional appeal in service of the 'greater' rhetoric. Inserted sporadically and without explanation into sermons that aimed to retain a charismatic, feel-good atmosphere, no further attempt was made here to acknowledge the complexities of social divisions

that continue to play a defining role in gender politics in South Africa. Instead, the performances could be described as embodying the populist, "world-affirming" nature of contemporary Pentecostalism (Wade 2016: 665) while expounding 'women's spirituality' through narratives that heavily promulgate nostalgia for traditional gender-roles (discussed again in Chapter 4). Here, these statements missed the opportunity to be anchor points for further conversations around gender issues in South Africa.

More dangerously, an apparent 'casual treatment' of these issues could be perceived as the 'get over it' attitude that has rung as a white motto in recent years. Hassim writes that "overtly-stressed" non-racialism has become a model for the vision of women's movements in South Africa, but that "the slogan of non-racialism and the emphasis on unity" can conceal the cleavages that historically (and presently) exist between groups (Hassim 1991: 77-78). The denial or dismissal of 'race' is often a self-serving endeavour, especially for whites (Hassim & Walker 1992: 80).

We need to be weary of suggesting that the need for conversations around the past and its effects on the present experiences of South African women has become redundant. The notion that South Africans now live in a 'free society' is an illusion that needs to change, and the "perpetual challenges" that women in South Africa continue to face since the advent of democracy can, and should be, placed firmly within the context of past injustices and experiences (Segalo 2015). In South Africa, there has been a prevalent post-democratic "ideation of social cohesion", but, while we may have imagined "more tolerance and acceptance for diverse opinions and standpoints", we are far from achieving this goal (Segalo 2015: 70). As Biko states, where privilege is still experienced at the expense of another, "a hastily arranged integration cannot be the solution to the problem" (in Segalo 2015: 73). Particularly, Puleng Segalo notes a pervasive "white absence" during conversations about "integration, cohesion, and togetherness" (2015: 70-71).

The pursuit of true cohesion would begin with the creation of spaces "for multiple converging and diverging stories to be told" (Motsemme 2004 in Segalo 2015: 78): "We ought to ask questions about who we are with multiple voices being given opportunities to respond" (Segalo 2015: 78). This is an articulation of the notion of "giving ordinary women voice", which has been central to feminist methodology in challenging conventional silencing of women's activities (Hassim & Walker 1992: 82). Of black women's experience, bell hooks states that "political self-recovery" is only attainable through the telling of their histories, and that the eager belief that racism is a thing of the past makes for "assimilation and forgetfulness" (1992: 176).

Arguably, narratives such as Phil Dooley's during the Colour Conference's second Sisterhood Session, suggests that discourses on diversity and cohesion resonate well with the ideals of the movement. Dooley, speaking on xenophobia, campaigns for acceptance of and compassion toward the 'other'. He stated that:

> I believe the voice of the church should be a reflection of all, of a myriad of humanity, and that means that we have to challenge ourselves to say that it is OK to have some people who look different from me, speak a different language from me, eat different food, whatever it might be, they may be very different but I am going to be embracing of them, I am going to speak publically, I am going to act in whatever I can to be an advocate for them, and the church has a significant role to play in being that (Dooley: 2017).

The problem, as will be expanded on, is that here, as well as throughout the movement, some are spoken for while not having the opportunity to speak for themselves. The collective 'Sisterhood', instead of being represented as a 'we' who preside over a multiplicity of differences, is frequently dichotemised as an 'Us' and 'Them'. The 'Us' is never separate from the all-encompassing 'One'—the movement itself as entity. As Segalo writes:

> There is a need to create a scholarly stage where counter-stories and voices can be heard in a quest for democracy and cohesiveness. The dominant discourse that so often overshadows voices from down below may lead to what may be called 'enforced cohesiveness' where narratives of cohesion (rainbow nation) are circulated without acknowledging visible signs of non-cohesion (2015: 76).

In the previous chapter, I wrote on how the rhetoric of 'giving ordinary women voice' is used extensively within the various platforms of the Colour Sisterhood movement, albeit while seemingly existing as means to reinforce the image of the movement and its founders rather than truly offering a diverse scope of women's experiences. During the Colour Conference, this rhetoric converges in the 'Sisterhood Session' performances—two live on-stage conversations among various participants, which I felt may have offered an environment fecund for addressing what had been missed in the online and preceding on-stage narratives.[65]

Opening the first Sisterhood Session was a video collage featuring various inserts by a selection of men and women from different countries, dealing with the "worth and value of women" (Houston 2017b). Among these we find the story of Sri Lanka born Australian, Lalita Stables, sales-executive at

[65] In this chapter, I focus on the first Sisterhood Session as it included 2 South African participants. In Chapter 4, I look at aspects of the second Sisterhood Session.

Google Australia. Her voice, at first traversing a black screen, states: "I thought I was the wrong colour, wrong gender, wrong ethnicity…to ever look at being a successful business woman" (Stables in *It's a Girl-Value Unearthed* 2017: 08:28). With footage taken from her now everyday life in Australia, she relates how her family lived in Africa, including South Africa, for 12 years and continues emotionally:

> We immigrated around the apartheid era when Mandela got released, we immigrated to Melbourne Australia. Growing up in South Africa was a really interesting experience. We were living in a segregated area, so we were classed as Indians. We were in an Indian area. We could only go to Indian schools, non-white toilets, or non-white restaurants. I find it hard to wrap my head around the fact that I was really a second-class citizen (Stables in *It's a Girl-Value Unearthed* 2017: 09:27).

She continues from here on to describe the subjective challenges of being a woman in the IT industry, while seemingly linking her fears and insecurities to her time in Apartheid South Africa. She ends by relating how she managed to integrate her church work with her career.

Through Stables, we are offered a glimpse into some of the far reaching effects of Apartheid on women's daily experiences and identity—what Segalo would call "women's silenced knowings" (2015: 76). Stories like these are invaluable in terms of contextualising the feminine situation within South Africa. In Segalo's words, they can serve as a bringing to light "the persistent ghosts that lurk in the various dark corners of our existence" in a quest for historical justice (2015: 79). Her story also inspires through its themes of inner strength, finding one's feminine essence and using this to navigate the male dominated world.

However, again, as with the 'stories' discussed in the preceding chapter, Stables' as potential contact point with an 'outside' stands in the shadow of the omnipresent 'Centre'. Here, however, while 'church' forms a major part of the rhetoric, we only realise its denotation of Hillsong afterwards when Houston feels pressed upon to point out that Stables serves on the board for their church "by the way" (Houston in *Sisterhood Session 1* 2017: 51:03).[66] The narrative surrounding 'church', or then, specifically Hillsong Church, emerges alongside the narrative of Stables finding her 'true' identity. The script and Houston's narrative seems to attempt to claim her empowered journey for 'this church' as she traverses the limits imposed on her to become a leader in both career and Hillsong.

[66] As discussed in the final chapter, Stables is the only female on Hillsong's Board of Directors.

Following the short film, Houston discusses the 2017 Colour Conference slogan 'Found in the Field', placing the activation of empathy at the core of the Sisterhood movement's goals and aims, a rhetoric that was strongly advocated throughout the conference (Dooley 2017, Gray 2017a, Houston 2017b). To be 'found' was described as being found in your (God-given) purpose, with "whatever is in your hand", alongside a "field" (Houston 2017b); the 'field' or 'fields' is a Biblical symbol for those who are 'lost', those that need 'saving'.[67] On the Sisterhood Session narratives, Houston (again referring to the printed invitation in her hand) states: "We are just talking about all the different fields that we find ourselves [in] in life", and that "this is actually about the everyday girls…this entire session is about the everyday girls!" (Houston 2017b). From an image of the invitation displayed overhead, Houston reads: "The Colour Sisterhood is made up of thousands of women and girls. All would agree that they are on a journey of self-discovery when it comes to all that life entails. In the midst of that journey they are doing their best to be found, not only in Christ but in the midst of their soil, planting and convictions" (Houston in *Sisterhood Session 1* 2017: 45:30).

During this introduction, the stage was transformed into a kind of make-shift 'living room' with hosts and guests seated in a half circle. The participants appeared relaxed on comfortable, cushioned couches among potted plants. Visually, this arrangement offered a welcome respite from the inherent panopticism of the stage. However, even in this design the movement seemed reluctant to let go of its power symbols.

Through the work of Michel Foucault, we understand 'power' as distributed and dispersed through every level of society (Foucault 1972: 119). The "privilege of sovereignty" is replaced by a "multiple and mobile field of force relations wherein far-reaching, but never completely stable effects of domination are produced" (Foucault 1978: 102). Discourse, (whether spoken, material, or symbolic)—the primary means by which power is 'acted out' upon an 'other' (1978: 18), is about "the political currency that is attributed to certain meanings, or systems of meaning, in such a way as to invest them with scientific legitimacy" (Braidotti 2013: 27). Of discourse, Foucault writes that:

> We must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies. It is this distribution that we must reconstruct, with the things said and those concealed, the enunciations required and those forbidden, that it comprises; with the variants and different effects—according to who is speaking, his position of power, the institutional context in which he happens to be situated (1978: 100)...we must make allowance for the complex and

[67] See Holy Bible 1973: Matthew 9: 37-38

> unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. (Foucault 1978: 101-102)

As described of the 'stories of ordinary women' in Chapter 1, as well as of that of Stables, a contradiction arises from the session's narrative offering, on the one hand, a platform for diverse voices, while, on the other, relegating them to serve the interests of 'the One', i.e. the desires of Houston and the ideals of the movement (including the broader Hillsong movement). Departing from her earlier rhetoric that brimmed with the possibility of bringing forth voices from a broad and inclusive local background, Houston proceeds to narrow down the session to 'scratching the surface' "of some great people who work and minister alongside us" (Houston in *Sisterhood Session 1* 2017:, 46:11).[68] Of the images on the digital background Houston seems almost caught off-guard as, after stating that "these images are very intentional" she continues with "here is my daughter Laura, who is stunning, and *yet* here is a beautiful woman, an everyday woman, her name is Faith, and she's just a faithful lady in our church, so, um, you know, it embraces everyone" (Houston in *Sisterhood Session 1* 2017). Upon introductions of the session's guests, it becomes clear that all but one participant, referred to only as 'Xanele', were employees of Hillsong. Nestled-in among Phil and Lucinda Dooley (Head pastors of Hillsong South Africa), Cassandra Langton (Creative Pastor at Hillsong Australia), Julia Rabello (Pastor at Hillsong Australia), and 'Mandy' (Overseer of the creative community at Hillsong South Africa), Xanele was also the only person of colour.[69]

The momentary microcosm that was the stage arrangement, the rhetoric and choice of guests inadvertently mimicked the power dynamics of the Colour Sisterhood. "Power", as Stuart Hall writes "must be understood…in broader cultural symbolic terms, including the power to represent someone or something in a certain way--within a certain regime of 'representation'. It includes the exercise of symbolic power through representational practices" (Hall 1997:259).

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[68] Houston writes of women serving in "the local Sisterhood within local church" that "they are the astounding everyday girls" from "literally all over the world" that she wishes to "honour" (2016: 89).

[69] Visually, this arrangement reminds of the words of bell hooks who writes: "Often individual black people and/or people of colour are in settings where we are the only coloured person present. In such settings unenlightened white folks often behave toward us as though we are the guests and they the hosts. They act as though our presence is less a function of our skill, aptitude, genius, and more the outcome of philanthropic charity. Thinking this way, they see our presence as functioning primarily as a testament of their largesse; it tells the world they are not racist" (hooks 2003: 33). While a direct application of this assessment to the Sisterhood Session performance would be too simplistic, there is a correlation between hook's observation and the manner in which Xanele's presence is assimilated into a discourse that ultimately testifies to the 'largesse' of the movement, as also finding expression here through the choice of the rest of the participants.

At the heads of the semi-circular seating arrangement were Houston and the Dooleys, who as the head pastors of Hillsong South Africa, spent large portions of the session commenting on Houston, her book *Stay the Path* and her ministry. Houston in turn answered questions on these topics and also interviewed the guests, except for Xanele, whom Phil Dooley interviewed for the most part. At odds with the narratives of the other participants, Xanele's story refreshingly made no direct mention of Hillsong or the Colour Sisterhood movement. However, Houston did emphasise that, for Xanele, in finding her confidence, "church played a key role" (Houston 2017b). Houston, as already mentioned in this chapter, also concluded the Xanele interview by comparing it to ""the beautiful Lalita who was on the screen earlier, who by the way sits on our board for our church" (Houston in *Sisterhood Session 1* 2017: 51:03).

As with Stables, Xanele's story, an inspirational tale of a young woman from humble beginnings growing up in a hut in Mataliele (imaged on the screen during her interview) who rises above her situation and her fears to a future of success, reads like the archetypal hero's adventure. The keeping of the photograph of Xanele's hut overhead (the only memory-image displayed during the session) contextualises her experience through an image that has become familiar in the telling of 'African stories'. Because Africa has relentlessly suffered representation through stereotypes, the notion of having come from a 'primitive, rural home' in a 'small village' would be an anticipated setting for the telling of the 'African Hero's' adventure. [70] In Western-centric representations, the 'others' are attached to, and seldom detached from, their cultures and places of origins (Longreen 2001: 229).[71]

According to Jacques Derrida, Western thought conceptualises 'being', meaning or existence through a "logic of binary oppositions" (Braidotti 1994b: 78).[72] In narrating a transition from 'Third World culture' into Western globalised culture, representations of the 'Us here'/'Them out there' dichotomy have been reinforced in what Hanne Longreen calls the 'developmental gaze' (Longreen 2001: 224-226). Power hierarchies between 'Us here' and 'Other' become reinstated through representations of "the premodern social and economic conditions of 'Others'" (Longreen 2001: 231). The efforts of social or economic 'developers'—here, positioned as being predominantly 'the church' (Dooley 2017)—are praised for the apparent 'remedying', or 'closing of distance' (Longreen 2001). In Houston's partial narration of Xanele's story, Xanele's quest from the hut is brought to a

[70] See Palmberg, M. (ed.). 2001. *Encounter Images in the Meetings Between Africa and Europe*. Uppsala: Centraltryckeriet Åke Svenson AB, Borås

[71] In the story shared in Chapter 1 of the woman who sold her shoes for conference tickets, an image of a South African township seems similarly misplaced among the rest of the footage that was taken in Hillsong contexts (Hilllsong Church 2017b: 20:21).

[72] See Derrida, J. 1981. *Disseminations*. Trans. London: Atholone Press

climactic end by the emphatic statement that Xanele (now) is "a big shopper with a shoe addiction", which apparently makes her, in Houston's words, "our kind of woman!" (Houston 2017b). The African hero's quest is therefore not only sealed in the binaries of rural to urban, poor to economically empowered, a hut to a national stage, but also in 'Other' to 'One of us'.

As a solitary beacon, the only local 'voice' having seemingly traversed the boundary to the 'Centre' from a real 'outside' (and even more sensationally, in real time!), Xanele's inspirational story fulfilled, symbolically, the position of 'the saved'. This position is also symbolic in the sense that it seems, again, inserted perhaps as an obligation to the South African environment, rendering her roots both overemphasised and inescapable—a Bourdieusian "objectified representation" of the apparent 'social state of things'.[73] Paradoxically, the narration of the journey from the 'hut' suggests that this is a part of her identity best left behind. The story seems to forget that some women in the audience may very likely come from or currently live in similar environments. No desire was shown to engage in conversations around the latent issues or triumphs that may surround women in these contexts.[74]

Also a South African participant and Hillsong employee, Mandy, spoke of her and her husband's past financial struggles and how they affected their relationship. The remaining interviews were in keeping with the light-hearted, witty, and charismatic style of the sermons and offered, from personal experience, advice packaged as self-help style one-liners (with a spiritual flavour)—for example: keep on serving in difficult times and treat others as you want to be treated. Sadly, while some encouragement may be found in these stories, they failed to articulate, or even touch on the many relevant struggles faced by women in South Africa. With Hillsong so pertinently at the epicentre, the conversation felt, while being among various participants, disappointingly one-sided.

[73] See Bourdieu, P. 1985. The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups. *Theory and Society*, 14(6): 723-744

[74] As this study continues to unfold it will become clear how an emphasis on Western-centric standards of success such as consumer buying power and mainstream beauty norms are an important part of the Colour Sisterhood's 'transcendentalist' femininity. The rhetoric of a 'flourishing' Sisterhood, a form of contemporary Pentecostalism's 'prosperity gospel' (Maddox 2013b) is strongly propagated throughout the movement. Also called the health-and-wealth gospel (Coleman 2011), much has been written from anthropological, theological and missiological perspectives either criticising these teachings as non-Biblical (see for example Lioy 2007, and Gbote & Kgatla 2014) or lauding their possibilities as socially and economically empowering (this perspective is taken in terms of African Pentecostalism by, for example, Heuser 2016, and Niemandt 2017). My position is that this message is the antithesis of the affirmation of difference, that it negates the possibilities inherent in those circumstances that these teachings may deem 'unfavourable', and that it sets impossible standards that become dichotomising markers between 'Us' and 'Others'. Such ideologies fail women not only from the viewpoint of secular feminism but even within the more conservative bounds of the movement's self-proclaimed Evangelical Christianity.

2.2 The 'Found' and the 'Field': Pan-humanist Representation of the Colour Sisterhood

Voiced by multiple women, the script from the 2017 Colour Conference's video teaser reads:

> I am part of a global family, a sisterhood, a vast tapestry of ages, cultures, and walks of life, a collective of women bringing out the God-colours...flourishing in our place of planting, co-workers in the field welcoming the broken and discarded, radiating life in the dark places, a growing movement of women across the earth, together, found in history...found in Him.[75]

This rhetoric that at first seems to advocate a femininity founded on multiplicity and diversity also houses the terms that will be shown to render this possibility a paradox—these are: the notion of 'flourishing' and the dichotomy of the 'field' and the 'workers' (which will be described using the term, as derived from the movement's rhetoric, 'the found'). In this chapter I am focusing on the latter, while the notion of 'flourishing' is expanded on in the next as well as in Chapter 4.

Colour Sisterhood femininity is consciously constructed and prescribed throughout the discourse of the movement. Everyday discourse in the Foucauldian sense, acting through a body, Body or bodies, also acts *on* the body. Describing 'bodily inscription' via Foucault, Braidotti writes:

> He [Foucault] argues that the constitution of the fragile, split subject of the postmetaphysical era is in fact a process of culturally coding certain functions and acts as signifying, acceptable, normal, desirable. In other words, one becomes a subject through a set of interdictions and permissions, which inscribe one's subjectivity in a bedrock of power (Braidotti 1994a: 12).

In other words, public and social discourses (from both high culture, such as academic or scientific institutions, and 'low' culture, such as the mainstream media) act to regulate fantasy (Butler 1990: 136-140) thereby producing a culturally sanctioned form of 'woman'.[76]

The Colour Sisterhood's 'princess theology', as identified and discussed extensively by Maddox, is an example of how persistent the assimilation, expression and performance of a certain 'icon of femininity' can be within the movement. In 2017, many women wore 'flower crowns' to the Colour Conference in Cape Town. The familiar, infantilising and materialist image of the 'Disney Princess' (albeit now the 'sanctified' version of "Daughter of a King" (Houston 2016: 45)) --perhaps the most

[75] Hillsong Church. 2017a. *Colour Conference 2017 Teaser*. [Video Invitation]. [O]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tmtl21I4Mo8 [2018, October]

[76] The nomadic project's 'politics of location' asserts the positioning of the subject within the spatial frame of the body---an 'embodiment' that takes place where physical, symbolic, and material social conditions overlap (Braidotti 1994a). The classical mind/body dichotomy is neither separated nor fused, but in a continual process of intersection, negotiation and production (*ibid*.).

unapologetically elitist symbol the movement could have chosen in its representations, remained a theme prominent in the Sisterhood imagery for many years. Crowns and sceptres first appearing in the 2000 Colour Conference invitation, different variations on the theme have donned its marketing material. In lieu of more direct references to 'royalty' such as the various 'crowns' found across its invitations, other symbolic elements have been ushered in to denote 'sovereignity' or 'transcendentalism'. These are, for example, angel wings, splashes of gold leaf on imagery denoting the 'Sisterhood' and 'Houston', and other more subtle 'photographic mechanisms of illumination'(as discussed in the upcoming sections).

Expressed through the "daughter of a King" figuration, a vital facet of the Colour Sisterhood femininity is that it is underscored by an incorporeal spiritual desire. This 'spiritual' desire—being as described in Chapter 1, not purely theistic but bound to the desire of the movement—is construed as setting its community apart as beyond the things of 'this world'. In *The Sisterhood* , for example, Houston talks about "heaven's blueprint for womanhood" which is narrated as having been revealed through the Sisterhood "journey" (Houston 2016: 6). This notion firstly suggests that femininity has a shape that is transcendental and divinely ordained, and secondly that the revelation and interpretation of this shape take place primarily (if not solely) through the Colour Sisterhood movement. This myth is interpreted visually (as we shall see in the upcoming sections) through photographic and cinematographic devices that 'illuminate' and 'separate' the bodies that represent it. Returning to my argument from Chapter One on how the movement's creative expression is seen as an interpretation of 'divine will', this adds an almost incontestable prescriptive element to its representation of femininity. [77]

While narrative and visual themes vary across its more than twenty years of discourse, a persistent thread has been that of 'being found'. The word 'found' is inscribed boldly across the cover pages of the 2015 to 2018 invitations, while during the 2017 campaign this notion is dichotomised against the 'field' (metaphorical for the 'lost' or 'lost world'). The 2017 Colour Conference theme 'being found in the field' is introduced via an excerpt from Walter Wangerin's Biblical novel *The Book of God* (1996) that describes the moment when the Biblical character Jacob sees his future wife, Rebecca. Houston reads from the book on how he fell in love with "the woman" as soon as he saw her "standing tall by the side of a white field" (Houston in Session 1 2017: 13: 56), and that God similarly falls "more in

[77] Another example of how desire within the movement is linked to a 'world beyond this world' is Houston's narration on the creative process for the 2017 Colour Conference invitation where she states that while "we are aware of our current "here and now", "the team sought to capture in film and photography", an expression of an awareness of "a world beyond this that compels us onward" (Houston in Hillsong 2016: brochure.colourconference.com). This reflects Biblical rhetoric (see Holy Bible 1973: John 17:16, John 15:19) and what is most likely the central tenet of most religious beliefs –that one must simultaneous inhabit the immanent and transient realms.

love with us" when we are 'found' (doing the will of God) next to the "fields" (Houston in Session 1 2017: 15: 08).[78]

The analogy of 'the field' is rendered on the on-screen projections, but also throughout the 2017 marketing material, as photographic or filmic representations of rice paddies or other grassy fields. In some instances, 'the field' is contemporised as urban 'city-scapes'. At times human figures may form part of the metaphorical 'field'.

The 2017 campaign is essentially a series of portraits of three young women who appear to be from different ethnic backgrounds, with fine, Western-like features, slight frames, and long hair worn loose around their shoulders, set against a variety of Chinese land- and city-scapes in the Guanxi Province of China. Figure 3 depicts the subjects in full-length, flowing, semi-transparent white dresses walking and holding hands among the grass of a plush green field while being led by what appears to be a local woman in traditional attire. The images evoke a Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic of mythical, idealised, sensual and jovial (but aloof) femininity.[79]

Through the play of light and movement the placid scenery is rendered poetically sublime, transporting from the 'real' to the 'imaginative' as in the landscape paintings of the Romanticism. Large light flares enter the frame along with the sunlight that plays across and enflames the long blades of grass in the foreground, while a mountain in the background is softly blotted out with a misty haze. The overall image is softly muted with a warm filter overlay.

Beautifully backlit in this light, the three 'Sisterhood' subjects appear almost ethereal or angelic—Boticelli's three Graces gently smiling at each other. They seem imbued with heavenly grace, a group collectively set apart. In contrast, however, the local woman appears to be 'outside' the bond

[78] In Chapter 4 I discuss how nostalgia for male approval is included in the movement's discourse on femininity.

[79] The physical attributes of the models in the 2017 campaign suggest the embodiment of femininity akin to the hyper-feminised, Westernised femininity propagated in the mainstream media. Youthful looks, delicate body frames, graceful gestures, fine Western-like features and hair, even amidst a range of skin tones, are preferred. There is some departure within the collection of invitations in the online archive, however, suggesting a more inclusive representation of women including some subjects of different cultures, ages, and body types. Refreshingly, from 2013 onwards, women of colour occupy primary subject positions throughout the invitations and feature on all but one front page—a welcome respite from the almost all-white cast from the years prior. Similarly, a change to the 2018 invitation (during the course of 2017) does away with its overwhelming representation of whiteness in favour of a series of portraits featuring two subjects of colour. Also, where the Sisterhood events are advertised online in context of Hillsong South Africa we find a much more diverse and interesting collection of photographs depicting women of different ages, ethnicities, and body types (Hillsong 2016: /south-africa/event/2018/07/sisterhood-25august/#.XGAFElUzaUk). However, as we shall see, especially in Chapter 4, a focus on 'beauty', Western consumerist beauty practices and fashion continue to serve as important markers for 'femininity' within the main visual material of the movement and conference.

shared between the threesome in white. She turns away, eyes downcast, while her features are almost erased by a dull, cold shadow separating her from the warm, illuminating tones bestowed on the rest of her party.

The presence of the 'sombre' ethnically dressed local Chinese women is at odds with the light, 'playful' uniformity of the Sisterhood. As in the example of Xanele, she seems symbolically inserted into this image as a sole 'link' to an 'Outside'. At the same time, she is in the 'process' of being 'saved'. Of course, the irony is that the Chinese woman is the one who belongs to this environment—who calls it 'home', while the three Sisterhood subjects, depicted as 'heaven-sent saviours', have come from the 'outside'. The same is true of the selection of guests surrounding Xanele from the first Sisterhood Session.

The uniformity of the Sisterhood subjects suggests a collective sanctification; a 'oneness' and a subjective transcendence that leaves behind differences. Houston writes that the declaration "I AM SISTERHOOD" "transcends culture and creed, age and status, prejudice and preference" (Houston 2016: 7).[80] A similar trend emerges within the archived collection of invitations. 'Oneness', a central concept to the movement's articulation of desire, is both visually and narratively expressed through the figuration of 'pan-humanness': the notion of an inter-continental, collective 'we' set against a common threat or 'Other' (Braidotti 2015).[81] Global feminism has, as we know, attempted to construct a formulation of 'woman' that assumes a "universal basis for feminism" and thereby suggest a "hegemonic structure of patriarchy" notwithstanding "historical...racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities" (Butler 1990: 3). The nomadic project is, as reiterated throughout this study, a means to creatively address this problem.

The message reflected in pan-humanistic imagery, far from being an exercise in the portrayal of diversity, suggests that differences are to be neutralised in favour of universal humanistic values (Braidotti 2013: 87-88). In describing pan-humanism, Braidotti does so at the hand of an

[80] Houston states that being able to say "I am Sisterhood", and "We are Sisterhood", is both liberating and powerful (2016: 7). Rather than voicing women's participation as their 'being part of the Sisterhood', the narrative instead suggest an *embodiment* of the movement and its femininity.

[81] On the first page of The Sisterhood, Houston refers to women in the cosmopolitan "daughters of planet earth" (2016: 3), and describes the Colour Sisterhood movement as a "collective...company of diverse and fabulous women across the earth" (2016: 7) The slogan "I AM SISTERHOOD", opening the movement's declaration (as well as being printed boldly across parts of the marketing material) evidences, as opposed to the alternative "I am part of the Sisterhood", the ideal of an embodiment of the collective rather than simply 'being a part of the collective'. The declaration reads in its first paragraph: "'I AM SISTERHOOD' is a declaration, a declaration about value and identity, purpose and mission. It is a declaration intentional in reach and embrace. It transcends culture and creed, age and status, prejudice and preference" (Houston 2016: 7). Houston states that being able to say "I am Sisterhood", and "We are Sisterhood", is both liberating and powerful" (2016: 7).

advertisement image from global fashion brand Benetton that portrays an interracial 'family'—white mother, black father, and an Asian baby covered in the same blanket, suggesting that there is a common 'we' who are in 'this' together (Braidotti 2015). A recent example of this figuration is the controversial 2017 Pears soap advertisement: a three-second video of a black woman who peels off her shirt to reveal a white woman, who in turn removes her shirt to reveal an Asian woman. [82] In a number of the Colour Conference invitations from throughout the years we see examples of interracial pairs or triads 'blanketed' together in images through a standardisation of physical attributes. Hairstyles, dress styles, accessories, props, poses and physical features are mirrored among the subjects, enforcing the figuration, as transcribed in *The Sisterhood*, that "She is One, She is Many" (Houston 2016: 248).

In images from the 2013 campaign (fig. 4, fig. 5), for example, the triad appear in an arid landscape with the phrase 'The Revolution' headlined in bold across the cover. Here, in contrast to what one may expect in light of this declaration, the subjects are dressed in short, high-waisted, pleated pastel coloured dresses while they appear to playfully giggle and frolic (fig. 5). This reiterates a post-feminist "nostalgia for girlhood" (McRobbie 2009: 109) that is pervasive in much of the movement's rhetoric.[83] Again, conformity is established through the choice of physiques, clothing and body language. While these women are from different races, they are remarkably alike.

In the first version of the 2018 invitation homogeneity across ethnicity is suggested through a frontal portrait (fig. 6) created from the amalgamation of two images of two women, one dark skinned and one light skinned, combined as halves to form the whole. In the 2016 invitation a portrait reminiscent of a 'generational family portrait' shows women of different ethnicities and ages grouped together tightly as if connected by an intimate bond. An excerpt from its scriptural caption reads: "all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms, get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies". [84] [85]

[82] The News Minute. 2017. *Dove Issues Apology for Racist Ad: What About Indian Ads that Sell 'Fair is Better'?* [O]. Available: http://www.thenewsminute.com/article/dove-issues-apology-racist-ad-what-about-indian-ads-sell-fair-better-69691. [2017, October]

[83] Houston writes of a feminine yearning for "days of their youth, when life was perhaps less complicated, complex or disappointing" (2016: 83). Houston also often uses infantilising terms of endearment such as "chick", "babe" and "girls" (2016).

[84] Hillsong Colour. 2016. Found: Be Found in the Mystery, [Online Brochure]. Available: http://e.issuu.com/embed.html#1452032/31291636 [2018, October]

[85] I have selected only a few of many examples of pan-human visual expressions within the movement's resources.

Figure 3: Hillsong. Colour Invitation 2017 Image 1. 2013.

(Hillsong 2016:/colour/capetown)

Figure 4: Hillsong. Colour Invitation 2013 Image 1. 2013.

(Hillsong 2016: http://e.issuu.com/embed.html#1452032/10472725)

Figure 5: Hillsong. Colour Invitation 2013 Image 2. 2013.

(Hillsong 2016: http://e.issuu.com/embed.html#1452032/10472709)

Figure 6: Hillsong. Colour Invitation 2018 Image 1. 2018.
(Hillsong 2016: http://issuu.com/hillsong/docs/cyw2018webbrochure?e=1452032/50363692)

Rather than advocating 'unity amongst difference', the overriding message here is that differences are 'purified' in order to achieve a homogenised 'Oneness'. As Andrew Melucci writes, *true* collective identity can be a powerful means of mobilisation when this identity is produced by multiple actors with "different orientations" who "are able to define themselves and their relationship with the environment" through non-linear interaction and negotiation (Melucci 1995: 43-44). "Continued action though such a collective is impossible without the constructive processes of negotiation and renegotiation that result in an acceptable and lasting unity" (Melucci 1995: 44). As Pierre Bourdieu puts it, lasting alliances are "always based on a more or less conscious misunderstanding" (1985: 737). This echoes Hassim and Walker's words: "For the alliance [the women's movement in South Africa] to be politically effective, the terms of the alliance and the processes of working together—the reality of difference—need to be honestly and openly negotiated" (1992: 84).[86]

We can therefore imagine such a (true) collective to be a non-centralised, vibrant, fluid, productive space that is, in the nomadic sense, constantly in a process of shifting and re-shifting territories.

[86] Hooks reiterates this by stating that: "Women need to come together in situations where there will be ideological disagreement and work to change the interaction so communication occurs. This means that when women come together, rather than pretend union, we would acknowledge that we are divided and must develop strategies to overcome fears, prejudices, resentments, competitiveness, etc." (hooks 1984: 63).

However, this would mean a figuration for the 'collective' that does not, as Braidotti states of pan-humanist figurations in general, negate the "power differentials that are still enacted and operationalised" (2013: 87). The alliance-shaping mechanisms would, again, include "working with difference in creative ways" and creating spaces for conversations and debate (Hassima & Walker 1992: 84-85). It would also mean that such a collective resists the formulation of yet another despotic institution. Butler warns:

> The effort to include "Other" cultures as variegated amplifications of a global phallocentrism constitutes an appropriative act that risks a repetition of the self-aggrandising gesture of phallogocentrism, colonising under the sign of the same those differences that might otherwise call that totalising concept into question. ...The effort to identify the enemy as singular in form is a reverse-discourse that uncritically mimics the strategy of the oppressor. (1990: 13)

While an active, productive, collective identity that celebrates difference is a valuable concept for feminism, transnationalist aspirations run the risk of forcibly levelling the plateaus of women's experience in its attempt to offer all-encompassing 'global solutions'. As Braidotti argues, we cannot begin to conceive 'difference' without first being grounded in our own national identity (1994: 257). She writes:

> Before we let ourselves joyfully celebrate our internationalism, therefore, let us ask ourselves: are we sufficiently present as citizens in our country to start thinking seriously about being citizens of the world? Unless we reflect seriously upon our own belonging to, involvement in, and implication with our culture, we are in danger of postulating internationalisation as yet another version of women's exile. In order to make sense of an international perspective, we must first think through the issues related to our own social, political, economic and intellectual citizenship. (Braidotti 1994a: 253)[87]

According to Linzi Manicom, South African feminism has traditionally been very reliant on figurations for a "transnational-, postnational-, or cosmopolitan citizenship" (Manicom 2005: 41). The umbrella term "citizens of South Africa" as categorizing of South African women in the *Women's Charter* was

[87] The aspect of recognising individual agency within different cultural contexts is important to how we treat the notion of 'multiculturalism'. As Anne Phillips argues in *Multiculturalism Without Culture* (2007), in order to address cultural inequalities we need to firstly affirm the conscious choices of individuals, free from the homogeneity of any given culture. Caren Kaplan states that "a politics of location is not useful when it is construed to be the reflection of authentic, primordial identities that are to be re-established and reaffirmed", but that it should instead identify "the grounds for historically specific differences and similarities between women in diverse and asymmetrical relations" (1994: 139). A politics of location should create "alternative histories, identities, and possibilities for alliance" (Kaplan 1994: 139).

meant to transcend "particularised sites of allegiance" and appealed to "a sovereign nation-state as the site of their belonging" (Manicom 2005: 39-40). Furthermore, the post-apartheid discourses formulated around 'women's struggles' were dependent on "transnational state-oriented feminist trends", "mediated by travelling feminist academics and consultants" (Manicom 2005: 40). The language and practices were founded on those of elite international organisations, for example of "UN-orchestrated institutions and conventions", "the Beijing Plan of Action and the Convention for the Elimination of All form of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)" (Manicom 2005: 40).

One of the risks we run when subsuming 'woman' under a common banner is, as Manicom describes, the resulting 'hierarchy of rights' that establishes itself among women. Braidotti writes that women's bodies become "markers of authentic cultural and ethnic identity, and...indicators of the stage of development of their respective civilization fault-lines" (2008: 6). Because the acquisition of rights is perceived as "being evolutionary", and because certain rights are privileged, some women—the 'elite' or those who preside over more 'rights' than others—come to "distinguish themselves from the abject women in the world who are...ostensibly lacking in rights, more oppressed and subordinated within familial and cultural relations" (Manicom 2005: 41).

While the 'transnational' formulation offers "rhetorical appeal", in for example, the shaping of "new kinds of political identities", the notion of transnational-citizenship "exacerbate the differences in opportunity and the hierarchies between women" —it results in the 'matronising' effect (Manicom 2005: 41). Rural African women, for example, come to occupy the globally symbolic position of "Third World Women"—the "poorest of the poor", or "the most oppressed" (Manicom 2005:41).[88] The common 'victimhood' shared by global collective 'woman'—by "universal feminist solidarity" is thus projected onto an 'other' woman: some women are rendered as "feminist subjects' and others as "objects of rescue" (Manicom 2005: 41).[89] Braidotti writes that "a certain type of emancipatory, equality-minded feminism is very much integrated into the Imperial project of domination of the west over the rest" (2014: 04:35).

[88] While the notion of 'Third World' is problematic, it sometimes consciously denotes a certain derogatory attitude that remains pervasive around the less developed countries.

[89] Hooks writes of feminism that "privileged-class white women swiftly declared their "ownership" of the movement, placing working-class white women, poor white women, and all women of colour in the position of followers...Parasitic class relations have overshadowed issues of race, nation, and gender in contemporary neo-colonialism. And feminism did not remain aloof from that dynamic" (hooks 2000a: 44). Those women who saw themselves as 'liberated' positioned themselves as the liberators of their more unfortunate sisters (hooks 2000a: 45). In Braidotti's words, "the dominant discourse nowadays is that 'our women' (Western, Christian, white or 'whitened' and raised in the secular Enlightenment tradition) are already liberated and thus do not need any more social incentives or emancipator policies. 'Their women' (non-Western, non-Christian, mostly not white and not whitened, as well as alien to the Enlightenment tradition), however are still backward and need to be targeted for special emancipation" (Braidotti 2008a: 6).

The Colour Sisterhood is a *petit rècit* reflecting this metanarrative. The representations of 'universality' serves to define its own, and not necessarily a 'global feminine' (as will become clearer as this study continues). The 2017 Guanxi campaign is an example of how, more than keeping to its rhetoric of 'making a difference in the places where you are' (Houston 2016), the Colour Sisterhood community is represented as having been subjectively (and thereby also physically) 'separated' from the world but that enter the 'world' as its saviours, creating a type of imperialist fantasy.

2.3 The 2017 Video Teaser: 'Illuminating' the Colour Sisterhood

The 'found/field' dichotomy is aesthetically expounded through a range of cinematographic devices in the 2017 two-minute video teaser. In this meticulous assemblage of essentially four kinds of filmic footage, the myth of a transcendental Colour Sisterhood femininity (set against an 'Other') is given expression through a range of mechanisms that 'separate' and 'illuminate' the bodies that represent it.[90] These cinematographic methods also serve as subjective technologies that are meant to produce in the viewer an emotional affinity with the 'found' subject.

The first and most recurrent kind of film footage consists of creatively fabricated, aesthetic 'visions' of young, beautiful women who engage bodily with various contrasting solitary spaces while appearing oblivious to the presence of the viewer. In these images, the portraits are regularly from behind, or the subjects look away from the camera, either disengaged from its gaze or towards some unseen landscape or presence beyond its frame. Often, the face is obscured: blowing drapes, foreground shapes rendered hazy from camera focus, strands of long, loose hair or the frame itself allows for the emergence of a mouth and nose, or an eye. These images can be described as 'dreamlike': chiaroscuro, transparent whites on opaque whites, as well as tight close-ups of details, soft lens-focus, lens blur and haze are employed to render them almost ethereal. The subjects are young and beautiful with slim bodies and long hair worn mostly loose. Their choreographed gestures and mannerisms enact a graceful 'femininity'. The isolated background 'spaces' include suggestions of minimalistic interiors that appear to be of both private and public nature, night-time city-scapes and undefined interior spaces, often permeated by a vast number of flowers, either suspended in the air as from the ceiling or rising as though bunched in containers off the unseen 'floor'.

These sequences are the 'grand opening' to the viewer's invitation to be 'part of': to become the subject, i.e. to become Sisterhood through internalising but also performing its fantasy of desire. On film, De Lauretis writes that the subject's 'performing of the film' relies on the film's "regulation of the flow of images, its "placing" of desire: "the cinematic apparatus...establishes terms of

[90] As we know, myth both purifies difference (Barthes 1957: 143), and marks difference (Hall 1997: 237), "leading us, symbolically to close ranks, shore up culture" (Babcock in Hall 1997: 237).

identification, orienting the movement of desire, and positioning the spectator in relation to them" (1984: 137). The two dichotomising elements that feature strongly here are 'the face', and what may perhaps be referred to via Deleuze as "any-space-whatevers". [91] The face always represents power. From the moment we have a face we have a system that totalises all significations and subjectivations (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 168-191).

However, as stated, the faces in these sequences seldom confront the viewer directly but turn away, and are at times fragmentised through close-ups, cropping or obscuring. By retaliating the camera's inherent 'male gaze', the face, turned away, detached or fragmented, can speak of a self-sufficient feminine desire—a fantasy of feminine autonomy (McRobbie 2009: 103-15). In the genre of fashion photography, McRobbie identifies such mechanisms as denoting a narcissistic placing of the subject beyond 'others' and the 'everyday' (2009: 103-109). She writes that this might not only suggest "a preference for the self, but an inflated sense of the self, as a more beautiful and hence more socially valuable subject, than any other (2009: 109).

'Any-space-whatever' is "a perfectly singular space, which has merely lost its homogeneity...it is a space of virtual conjunction, grasped as pure locus of the possible" (Deleuze 1986: 109). In other words, it is a space that has lost its identity. 'Any-space-whatever' imagery is "extracted from...a determinate space", by various means. Something that was once place becomes non-place, it becomes a possibility, a multiplicity; it can be spiritual (Deleuze 1986: 109-114). It is therefore at the same time intimate/personal, and generic—but also purified, devoid of 'real-life'. They may become either light and shadow, or colour, or appear as "ambiguous or deepened geological spaces" or "theatres emptied of the operations which took place there" (Deleuze 1986: 120-121).) Here the subject finds herself in unidentified rooms, on an empty bus, a cropped elevator, a sequence of chairs, on a rooftop in the city. They may, as Leslie W. Rabine of mechanisms employed in fashion photography, express feminine desire as a freedom to "be in the city, to be alone, to be self-contained" –suggesting the feminine subject presides over her own autonomy and desires (2009: 104). They may also mirror the feminine awareness of, in the words of De Lauretis, a "feeling of internal distance, a contradiction, a space of silence which is there alongside the imaginary pull of cultural and ideological representations" (1987: 134).

[91] Deleuze's Cinema books do not attempt to apply a new theory to, nor invent a new theory for cinema, but rather use cinema as an "accelerator on reflection"—a "philosopher's machine for reflection" (Ropers-Wuilleumier 1994:255).This being said, I would like to call on some of the visual observations and terminology underlying Deleuze's more complex philosophical reflection as part the analysis here.

These spaces become provocative to the viewer by sustaining the simultaneous duality of "illusion of voyeuristic separation" and a "projection of the repressed desire onto the performer" (Mulvey 1989: 17). The spaces are encountered via positions that allow "pleasurable looking" (Mulvey 1989: 16-18) whilst imparting through cinematographic mechanisms a definite sense that the viewer is meant to be 'hidden' in the same space as the subject—i.e. she is 'there with the subject'. Deleuze would call this a "cinematographic Mitsein": "the anonymous viewpoint of someone unidentified amongst the characters" (1986: 72). Often, the spaces are 'entered into' through a moving camera or panning, sometimes 'emerging' seemingly undetected from beyond or behind something (curtains, glass panes, foreground objects obscured by short lens focus). The camera tracks the subject who is oblivious of its presence. In one sequence, the camera follows the subject through a white-on-white interior space as she walks toward an illuminated door. With only her feet and ankles visible, the camera angle is at floor level whilst the focus is very tight, rendering her feet as if close enough to touch. In the bus sequence, the tracking movement of the camera mimics a walking-movement from a subject position—the viewer is allowed to 'walk' closely behind the unaware subject, while fixating on her neck, lower back and shoulders.

Other than subject and viewer, a third presence subtly occupies these spaces. This 'presence' is articulated through elements such as light, wind, and flowers. More than mere inanimate objects or background effects, these elements seem imbued with a life force. We see this, for example, in the abundance of flowers that seem to have proliferated spontaneously across unexpected surfaces, and how, while a woman dances alone on a dusky city rooftop, a single rose rises from an air vent.[92] This 'third presence' appears to be a 'feminine' expression of 'divine presence or desire', which is, as already discussed, linked to the movement's portrayal of 'feminine desire'. The lyrics from montage's soundtrack read: "Skylines and crowded streets calling my attention. The limelight and empty dreams, grieving my affections. But there is a perfect voice, waiting above the noise. Jesus my only choice when all the lights are screaming".[93]

Reiterating the notion of a collectively 'illuminated Sisterhood' is a collection of footage of vast, real-life conference audiences highlighted or silhouetted in flashing and colourful strobe lights against its blackened interiors—an experience shared by conference audiences in every arena.[94] The 'collective'

[92] 'Flourishing', which forms a central part of the Colour Sisterhood rhetoric on desire (discussed more broadly in the next two chapters) is also illustrated by the flowers that multiplying excessively across these almost 'clinical' interior spaces.

[93] Hillsong Church. 2017a. *Colour Conference 2017 Teaser*. [Video Invitation]. [O]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tmtl21I4Mo8 [2018, October]

[94] This 'moment of illumination' occurring through the flashing lights, the confetti and gifts that 'rain down' from the ceiling was also filmed during every 2017 conference in each location, and displayed in turn to every

element of the Colour femininity is further elucidated through a sequence of facial close-ups of women from different ethnic ancestry who, against a white background, narrate in parts "together found in history, found, found, found in Him" (Hillsong Church 2017: 1:16).

This 'collective' again necessitates a 'symbolic other' as part of the found/field binary. The fourth kind of footage is included to this end, showing obscure imagery of women in traditional garb in a 'field', wide-eyed (albeit smiling) African and Indian children, and a cluttered Asian shanty town.[95] These 'Third World tropes' are materialised through short flashes of either 'grainy' or naturalistic documentary-style filmic imagery and greatly contrast the cinematographically polished, time- and mythically loaded 'found' imagery.[96]

Conclusion

Separating the 'Sisterhood subjects' through mechanisms of illumination and dichotomisation denotes an elitist 'belonging', that, in less abstract ways, is inherent to the general language and mechanisms in its various levels of operation. As an example, the audience members at the 2017 Colour Conference were largely addressed as belonging to a collective who preside over privileges—who are able to 'sponsor' tickets to those of little means (also in the audience) (Houston 2017b), who understand specialised gym equipment (Dooley 2017), who binge-watch television series (Houston 2017c: 43: 01) or who are on the overly sympathetic end of 'giving money' to an undeserving car guard (Dooley 2017). The conference tickets were purchasable only through an online portal and by means of credit card, and were priced at R650 each, which is about a quarter of South Africa's monthly minimum wage.[97] [98] The conferences are typically held in upmarket venues. The 2017 Cape Town Conference was for example hosted in Emperor's Palace Casino on the outskirts of Cape Town, making not only accessibility a problem but even something as simple as purchasing affordable meals during the event nearly impossible.[99]

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successive conference as a unifying mechanism. Momentarily, notwithstanding distance created by space and time, this allowed for an experience of 'being part of' this environment across global borders.

[95] As Susan Sontag notes, the "journalistic custom inherits the centuries-old practice of exhibiting exotic—that is to say colonised--human beings", mostly from Africa or Asia. (Sontag 2003: 57).

[96] As seen in the next chapter, a sporadic inclusion of these stereotypical 'tropes' feature similarly within the movement's website.

[97] Mywage.co.za. 2017. Minimum Wages in South Africa. [O]. Available https://mywage.co.za/main/salary/minimum-wages [December 2017]

[98] Cassandra Langton states that they stopped giving away 'free' tickets to the Colour Conferences as women apparently stated that "this places no dignity on us" (Langton in The Making of A Story 2017: 20: 04).

[99] Recently, Hillsong Church South Africa has begun hosting smaller 'Sisterhood events' for its members in various locations. While the main, annual event seems to cater for a specific income group, these mornings are free of charge and include venues in lower income zones.

The inclusivity of the conference for women from "all walks of life" (Houston 2017b) is therefore compromised by the logistics of the conference itself, and further negated through the suggestion that 'privilege' is somehow divinely bestowed upon those who are spiritually sound (i.e. as a theology of 'flourishing'). In the "harsh economic reality" of South Africa where African women bear the brunt of unemployment (McEwan 2005: 184), one cannot imagine how this message will resonate had the conference been accessible to such. As Maddox writes, the message here is that the neo-liberal virtues of hyper-individualism, those of "initiative, aspiration, self-belief and self motivation" trump "the virtues of solidarity and community" that would be advantageous in the village or factory floor" (2013: 2).

As mentioned, 'rights discourse' in South Africa—the notion of a 'universal woman subject'—has resulted in the privileging of what Manicom calls 'positive rights': those that "connote active participation in the institutions of representation", "self-determination" and "self-governance", over "entitlement rights": those "characterised by dependence on public support" by those "in need", by "the poorest of the poor" (2005: 37). Entitlement rights are often negatively perceived because of their "association with dependency and victimhood" (Manicom 2005: 38). However, it is precisely the adverse conditions experienced by "women in marginalised communities"—the "high rates of unemployment, poor housing and poor living conditions" that more often than not foster the desire and provide the incentives "to be active in local governance and development projects" (McEwan 2005: 186).

In a county where feminism relies heavily on non-political women's organisations as ally to its political counterpart, the bringing together of 10 000 women through the Colour Sisterhood movement may be a promising endeavour for the broader feminist movement in South Africa. However, the relevance of such a movement—its ability to foster feminist subjectivities and to be truly transformative in South African society—would only begin if certain factors were undeniably present at its core. The nomadic "recognition of difference"—of not only gender, race and class, but also of the multiplicity of experiences, backgrounds, and socio-political circumstances pertaining to South African women individually and collectively, is the starting point. Inseparable to this pursuit is acknowledging the pertinent role history plays on the present experiences of women. It is the imparting of the 'knowledge of difference' that needs to boldly underscore its goals and aims if the movement is to be relevant at a local as opposed to a merely idealistic cosmopolitan global level. True cohesion and 'healing' starts at the "uncomfortable intersections" created when multiple voices are heard (Segalo 2015:78)—creating 'spaces for conversation' is fundamental to teaching difference.

During the Colour Conference 2017 in Cape Town, the performance called the 'Sisterhood Sessions' could have provided a fecund conversational platform for the telling of diverse stories-- for questions and responses from a South African perspective. Sadly, while touching on the South African context and history through an interview with a South African woman of colour, Xanele, the opportunity to really get involved in the discourse of South African women's ongoing struggles, *by* South African women, was entirely missed. This, arguably, is due to reluctance on the part of the movement to truly diverge from its 'Centre'— i.e. of representations of the movement itself by its own members. There seems to be little movement away from a symbolic discourse and representation on South African experience toward an 'active' discourse and representation.

Representations of the Colour Sisterhood, both visually and narratively, rely on creating a dichotomy between 'Us' (the Found), as transcendental Sisterhood community, and 'Them' (the Field)—those in need of saving. The collective 'Us' manifests both visually and narratively through idealised, pan-humanistic representations suggesting that differences and desires have been 'purified' in favour of a global collective. These representations also speak of a 'spiritual', subjective 'oneness' that places those of the Sisterhood 'above the things of this world'. The representational Sisterhood subject, physically 'beautiful' and 'illuminated' by a range of cinematographic technologies, is rendered desirable as symbolic of the ideal Sisterhood subjectivity.

For South Africa, these representations mimic the problematic language of an elitist-defined transnationalism that has been pervasive in political figurations for women's citizenship. The risk run by denying the many variegated levels of women's experience in favour of 'global answers' is that a subjective divide among women who see themselves as presiding over rights and those they perceive as lacking in rights is perpetuated. Some women come to position themselves as 'saviours' against the 'victim other' who symbolically fulfil the role of all women's 'victimhood'.

If the Colour Sisterhood is to utilise the powerful platform that is the Colour Conference to be truly transformative on a local, South African level, I would suggest, as a starting point, it taps into the resource that is its nine South African branches. Running across Gauteng and the Western Cape, including two in township settlements, Gugulethu and Mitchell's Plain, these congregations would undoubtedly offer fecund possibilities in adding voices to the conference performances and add value to its conversational platform, the Sisterhood Sessions. Furthermore, in a country where working positively with difference is invaluable to a pursuit of cohesion, a tangible sensitivity to visual and narrative representation that reinforce divides among women has to be present. In fact, an active resistance to such representation would be a highly desirable endeavour as part of the

movement's transformative gesture on both a political level as well as on the level of 'church' or 'religion' as 'homeground'. As Martin Luther King Jr. states:

> The contemporary church is often a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. It is so often the arch-supporter of the status quo. Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the church's silent and often vocal sanction of things as they are (in Loynes 2016: 238).

Again, Braidotti's nomadic project is useful in imagining what a pedagogic model for 'teaching difference' could look like—a model I believe should apply any collective, movement or institution that aims to foster nomadic feminist subjectivities. She writes:

> It was and still is the dream of actually constituting communities of learning: schools, universities, books and curricula, debating societies, theatre, radio, television and media programmes- and later, websites and computer environments—that look like the society they both reflect, serve and help construct. It is the dream of producing socially relevant knowledge that is attuned to basic principles of social justice, the respect for human decency and diversity, the rejection of false universalisms; the affirmation of the positivity of difference; the principles of academic freedom, anti-racism, openness to others and conviviality (Braidotti 2013: 11).

In an interview, Mauritius' first female president Ameenah Gurib-Fakim states: "We' ve seen that whenever there was diversity, whenever there was openness, whenever there was dialogue...societies have been most productive".[100]

[100]Gurib-Fakim in TEDGlobal. 2017. *An Interview Mauritius's First Female President*. [TED Conference Talk]. [O]. Available: https://www.ted.com/talks/ameenah_gurib_fakim_an_interview_with_mauritius_s_first_female_president [2018, October]

Chapter 3

From a Whisper to a Shout: Representing 'Mobilisation' Within the Colour Sisterhood Movement

Introduction

As hooks emphatically states, "feminists are made, not born... one becomes a believer in feminist politics through choice and *action*" (my emphasis) (hooks 2000: 7). Hassim similarly recognises the 'active component' as being crucial to what can be considered 'strong social movements', whether feminine, or feminist. I have argued throughout this thesis via Hassim that the feminist movement in South Africa is constituted of a broad body of organisations, many being non-political in nature.[101] She calls for the recognition of those movements that are in essence 'feminine'— i.e. focusing on "practical gender interests" as relevant to those considered 'feminist'—focused on "strategic gender interests" (Hassim 2004). However, if these non-political movements are to truly affect change, they need to drive and facilitate the 'active component', defined, for Hassim, by the following set of qualifying characteristics: 1.) "the capacity to articulate the particular interests of its constituencies", 2.) to "mobilise those constituencies in defence of those interests" and 3.) "to develop independent strategies to achieve its aims while holding open possibilities for alliance with other progressive movements" (Hassim 2004: 1).

An ongoing rhetoric of 'mobilisation'— posited as being for both global and local contexts—infuses the media and on-stage narratives of the Colour Sisterhood. During the 2017 Colour Conference, Houston states:

> So as you know, this mandate of sisterhood is not passive. It is not a passive message nor mandate. And you know... we have a twenty year history in this. And as again, the language on the screen suggests, by the grace of God as a company of women, we are choosing empathy. We are choosing empathy over sympathy cause there is actually a difference...and we are choosing to be active, we are choosing action over a sense of helplessness or apathy when it comes to the many issues that are facing this world. So again, if I could just say this: these sessions are about being empowered, and um, scratching the surface, and stirring our spirits so we can actually make a difference... We have a saying in our church when it comes to the many needs and thing pressing in this world... it's a saying that goes 'we can't do everything, but we must do something' ...you know it's true, we can't do everything...there is so much need in this continent of Africa alone, let alone other places in the world, and we

[101] Chapter 2 expands on Hassim's defence of heterogeneous non-political organisations as part of the larger 'women's movement' in South Africa.

> can't do everything but we can do something and that something matters to the one who is the recipient of that (Houston in *Sisterhood Session 2* 2017: 1:38-3:39).

As seen here, mobilisation centres on philanthropic activism rather than feminist issues around gender equality. My investigation follows from the premise, as articulated by Hassim via Maxine Mollyneux, that "it is possible to conceive of a women's movement as containing within it conservative elements that organise women from a particular social base but do not seek to question power relations within that base, let alone society more generally" (2004: 2). "The political space that has been left by a failure to confront women's daily concerns"; "politicizing the Private, Motherhood, and wifehood are the very issues that draw millions of black women into church-based groups such as the mother's unions, sewing and other self-help groups" (Hassim 1991: 73-74). This contrasts "feminism's direct political dimension" (*ibid.*).

Even so, if such 'women's movements' are to transform society, 'feminist ideology', or an ideology challenging power relations of gender (as well as class and race, among other 'fields' of experience) needs to be recognisable in its actions (Hassim 2004: 4-5). Allowing women to be 'empowered' to make a difference, as implied by Houston's narrative above, will mean that women's autonomy and agency will be championed as the very first step to this endeavour.

In *The Sisterhood* Houston asserts that "the invitation was always to place value upon womanhood, in order that womanhood can arise and place value upon humanity" (2016: 254). This chapter seeks to explore the discourse on and different avenues for women's mobilisation as articulated by the Colour Sisterhood and question whether the (feminist) notion of women's empowerment is truly at the heart of its call to activation, or whether this notion is simply appropriated as embellishment for the movement. I look at the narratives, representations and rituals that surround 'Colour Sisterhood mobilisation' as they arise within the movement's literature as well as presented online and encountered during the 2017 Colour Conference in Cape Town.

3.1 Narrating 'Mobilisation': Women's Power and Substitution Fantasies

Interwoven with the movement's origin myth—the story of how the movement began as an answer to a 'Divine whisper' experienced by Houston (Houston 2016: 4)—the movement's simple but regularly recited slogan: 'from a whisper to a shout' is deemed to encapsulate the 'Sisterhood story'—from its 'gentle' beginning to radical outcome (Houston 2016: 251). Houston writes: "the whisper has resonated with many and become a shout—a ripple-effect shout of radical change and tangible hope for multitudes around the world" (2016: 251). Elsewhere, she states: "'from a whisper

to a shout' rolls off our tongues and has adorned conference invitations and openers... it would become a force—a force that would issue from God's very own nature and deeply affect all it touched" (2016:13).

Depicted as more than that initial divine encounter between Houston and God, the 'whisper' becomes construed as the iconic 'call' to all of the 'Sisterhood'.[102] The 'whisper' articulates the Evangelical Christian belief that God often speaks to individuals as 'a still small voice', 'impression' or 'thought' (Joubert & Maartens 2018, Dein & Cook 2015), but does, however, seem specifically 'coined' for the movement as a 'feminised' version of this theme. Houston, for example, compares 'the whisper' to what she calls 'endearing language'—such as her own use of "sweetheart" and "gorgeous girl" (2016: 63-64).[103] She talks about the whisper being part of "God romancing his daughters", and that it is directed at those daughters whose "gorgeous names are lovingly and affectionately inscribed on his heart" (2016: 72, 48). While the 'whispers' experienced by Houston seemingly are meant for the collective, members are also urged to experience the 'whisper' personally (Hillsong 2016: fr/colour/sisterhood/what-we-believe/, Hillsong 2016:/fr/collected/blog/2016/11/day-1-prayers-and-whispers/#.WuxApaSFOUk) and attendees sometimes use the word 'whisper' in describing their own spiritual experiences.[104]

As described by Maddox (2013a), and expanded on in Chapter 4, the movement upholds 'male approval' as an important factor in its construction of femininity, and that its language, even when relaying the 'spiritual', is therefore overly-romanticised.[105] The notion that 'God falls more in love' with those who are available to work in 'the fields', as mentioned in the previous chapter, is already dutifully assimilated into this intimate moment of instruction that is reserved for the 'Sisterhood'. Houston writes that her prayer for the 'Sisterhood' is that they will be like the woman from Song of Songs whose "heart heard her lover calling and she eventually responded" (2016: 181).

[102] In *The Sisterhood* (2016) Houston speaks often of how she experiences 'the whisper' in terms of various aspects of the movement. She also states, however, that she believes that she has never heard the 'audible voice of God' (Houston 2016: 16, Hillsong 2016: /fr/collected/blog/2016/11/day-3-are-you-listening/#.Wuw6h6SFOUk)

[103] Houston often refers to women in infantalising terms.

[104] Mazey, J. 2013. 500 Project. Beautiful feet. [O]. Available: https://hillsong.com/fr/collected/blog/2013/08/500-project-beautiful-feet/#.WuwxjqSFOUk [2018, May]

[105] Jennifer Coates notes how, within the typical, dominant women's discourse, "the construction of themselves as feminine involves simultaneously the construction of themselves as heterosocial" and that, "because this process is virtually invisible: this means that criticism or resistance becomes very difficult" (1996: 248).

During the second Sisterhood Session, the primary site for conversation on aspects of mobilisation at the 2017 Colour Conference, Lucinda Dooley implores: "Imagine if all of us in this room do something. If all of us in this room do something...You know I believe the whisper becomes a shout, and the shout becomes a roar, and then the roar spreads throughout the continent of Africa, and you know um, on our own we're good, but together we're awesome" (Dooley in *Sisterhood Session 2* 2017: 48:30). Audience members unanimously complete the slogan when incited from the stage.

As argued of the Colour Conference and 'women's worship', ritualistic use of slogans and other 'utterances' help to establish places of 'belonging'. As Deleuze and Guattari write of 'the refrain', "sonorous or vocal components", gestures, and movements are territorialising agents that serve various functions: "amorous, professional or social, liturgical or cosmic" (1987:312). They "delineate a territory that will belong to the subject that carries or produces them" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 316). They group different forces together, while binding the forces of chaos (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 321). Similarly, reciting the slogan "from a whisper to a shout" draws a circle around 'Godly' mandate (the divine whisper relayed through Houston) and 'activation' through the Colour Sisterhood (the 'collective' shout). Again, however, Houston's own experience—what she calls the 'God-whisper story", (Hillsong 2016: /collected/blog/2017/03/stay-the-path-chapter-1-excerpt/#.WwWCcO6FOUk) is so often dictated, not only in *The Sisterhood*, but in its descriptions across purchasing sites as well as the movement's website and elsewhere, that it becomes impossible to loosen the term from its author.

The revolutionary fervour seemingly encapsulated in this mini-narrative is explicated in more militaristic terms elsewhere in the movement's discourse.[106] Houston suggests that the Colour Sisterhood is a means for God to gather and mobilise his "daughter troops" (2016: 90, 103), and states that "the troops were gathering, and what we had figuratively been referring to as 'an army' was beginning to take literal shape" (2016: 103). Radical, *feminist* action from the "army of everyday women" (*ibid.*) seems promisingly imminent. Houston writes that "the challenge front and centre of the Sisterhood" is "fighting for the freedom of the furthest heart"—"from the literal captive within a dark and filthy brothel to the (captive) housewife who behind the perfect picket-fence facade hates her existence, to the (captive) schoolgirl being sold a lie about her personhood and value" (2016: 202). She continues that:

> To this end, those within the true heart and spirit of Sisterhood have been gathered, equipped, and mobilised. To this end, the Spirit of God has compelled and rallied us like the

[106] I briefly mention this in Chapter 1.

> troops mentioned in Micah. A new wineskin has taken shape, enabling everyday girls to step in and engage the battle with renewed precision... they were becoming a force for good and a movement that was being felt on the ground (Houston 2016: 203).

A 'spirit of revolution' is often suggested visually within the movement through themes with a familiar propagandic undertone. An example is a range of digital 'posters' or 'memes' calling to 'arms' the Sisterhood through punchy one-liners and simplified graphic illustrations. Along with their descriptions, they communicate messages on social justice, the refugee crisis, and slavery among other 'world issues'. As an example figure 7 shows a basic line illustration of clenched hands pulling apart and breaking a set of handcuffs underscored by the boldly-printed hash-tag '#wagepeace'. Here, the image serves to 'commemorate' "the International day for the Abolition of Slavery, a day to remember that slavery still exists across the globe and to recommit to fighting it in the whatever ways we can".[107] [108]

[107] Coloursisterhood. 2017. #wagepeace. [O]. Available: https://www.instagram.com/p/BcLaXJwl_ro/?hl=en&taken-by=coloursisterhood [2018, April]

[108] From 2017, the world-famous U.S based movement 'Women's March', founded in response to and critique of various aspects of the Trump administration, similarly launched many of their initiatives through 'propaganda memes', linked to the hash-tag #SignofResistance. These 'signs' are used to launch acts of resistance such as marches, boycotts and strikes, raise awareness on issues such as women's reproductive rights and immigration policies, and support external initiatives such as anti-racism movement 'Black Lives Matter'. The artwork is often contributed by its members and similarly uses bold typography and simplified graphics with attention-grabbing slogans. This is an example of the mobilising potential of 'memes of resistance', contrasting the static example here. See Women's March. Nd. [O]. Available: https://www.facebook.com/search/str/%23SignOfResistance/stories-keyword/stories-public [2018, April]

Figure 7: Coloursisterhood. #wagepeace Meme. 2017.

(Coloursisterhood: https://www.instagram.com/p/BcLaXJwl_ro/?taken-by=coloursisterhood)

While this discourse on radical mobilisation may conjure images of thousands of 'Sisterhood' women taking to the streets, demanding change, holding justice systems accountable or raising awareness, the truth is that the revolutionary fire here burns brighter in representation than it does in actual mobilisation. In fact, it seems almost extinguished by a choice of stereotyped-ridden narratives delimiting 'Sisterhood activation'. As an example, shortly following the militaristic implorations excepted above, we are met with this anti-climax:

> To this end [strategies for mobilisation], the Colour gifts (the two-dollar mirrors, the rubber gloves, and the symbols of value) morphed into uncanny and unlikely weapons of warfare! Cupcakes and teapots, water bottles and T-shirts, knitting needles and prayer journals, money boxes and colourful paints cans (and not least, beautifully created Bibles to pass on to others) were added to the ongoing story and become the means that helped mobilise our Sisterhood-hearts and facilitate inroads into many of these pressing humanitarian needs (Houston 2016: 203).

This list of objects is offered by Houston as an example of "response strategies" that she describes as being "dropped unexpectedly into my spirit in the dawn hours" (2016: 204).[109] [110] A few pages on she continues that "our catch cry and war cry to *be the change* became the strategy around a new Colour industry designed to equip the girls with tools to facilitate change in the everyday setting of everyday life. Who could have imagined that the clink of a teacup, the click of some knitting needles...could become the deafening sound of freedom? But they did" (Houston 2016: 206). Elsewhere, she writes that God was teaching them "the extreme diversity of placing value upon others" which may be "as simple and understated as an ice cream on a stick or an inexpensive makeup accessory"(Houston 2016: 76).

This overly optimistic repertoire of (mostly) gendered objects as "weapons of warfare" seems to construe the radical standard of 'women's activation' as being limited to the 'everyday and the mundane', hedged within the confines of the domestic sphere. In the rhetoric that follows, Houston continues in this vein stating that "the battle is so often won by the girls in their living rooms, kitchens, or bedrooms—they're the ones who in prayer and supplication push back the darkness, creating a way for miracle breakthroughs" (Houston 2016: 207). While we certainly can recognise how change can and must ensue from 'everyday settings', recognition here is not equally verbalised for those who, in the words of Houston, "literally stare down the enemy on the front line" (*ibid.*).[111] Instead the rhetoric almost always emphasises mobilisation in a 'supporting' rather than primary role. The narrative goes:

> If stretching the monthly finances to help an impoverished child or an HIV/AIDS-suffering woman was needed, then we would grow our capacity to include them in our family budget. If discipline was needed to throw on a pair of sneakers in order to "walk and pray" for sisters, cities, and streets, then disciplined we would become. The sidewalks became our altar. If any number of our diverse and widespread projects needed support, we would learn how to gather our equally diverse and widespread friends to network around a kitchen table

[109] Again, as described in Chapter 1, Houston is positioned as the 'sole recipient of the revelation of God's will for the 'Sisterhood', however, she attempts to 'give credit' by stating that these 'strategies' "grew in clarity and precision as those around the planning tables captured the vision and added their genius to what they were about" (Houston 2016: 204).

[110] While it is not really clear how these objects (given as 'gifts' to Colour Conference audiences) ought to be used as 'weapons of warfare', Houston seems to justify this label by relating how a women came to believe that she was "indeed beautiful" through the engraved make-up mirror that was the 'Colour gift' that year (2016:78-81).

[111] Ahmed writes of feminism for example that "we can think of feminism as happening in the very places that have historically been bracketed as not political: in domestic arrangements, at home, every room of the house can be a feminist room…feminism is wherever feminism needs to be. Feminism needs to be everywhere" (2017: 3-4).

> or café counter in order to bring ease to their circumstance and strength to their failing hearts (Houston 2016: 205-206).

While we have the myth of extreme militarism (which is traditionally associated with the masculine (hooks 1984: 86)) on the one hand, on the other, the fantasy of feminine aggressive 'power' is quickly disarmed through rhetoric centring only on nostalgia for traditional femininity and complacency. 'Activation' seems largely articulated on the very terms that hindered women's participation in public life.[112] It evokes the traditional stereotype of passivity, unassertiveness and inability to make decisions as being typical female traits (hooks 1984: 91, Braidotti 1994a: 256).

Naomi Wolf, who problematises discourse naturalising "the desire to shape, transform, even dominate the environment" as a purely masculine impulse, writes that girls are taught to "conceal and deny those will-to-power fantasies, which become unspeakable, obscene" (1993: 263).[113] According to Wolf, repressed feminine desires for dominance surface through women's "cultures of escapism" (1993: 266). The 'princess' ideology (or a fantasy of 'sovereignty'), which, as we saw in the previous chapter was and continues to be pervasive in the movement, is one example of this (Wolf 1993: 267).[114] This figuration that, as argued, results in a dichotomising of women as 'Us' and 'Other' through elitist-defined markers of 'rights' and 'success', similarly underscores how 'mobilisation' is framed by the Colour Sisterhood movement. This will be seen more clearly on the upcoming section describing the movement's theology of 'flourishing'. Hooks finds a correlation between women's 'unacknowledged (or unfulfilled) drive to power' and the manner in which the "feminist movement" has been shaped "using the class and race hierarchies that exists in the larger society" (1984: 86).

As already mentioned in the first chapter, Maddox (2013a) argues that figurations of combat reflect the 'dominionist' aspect of Hillsong—a myth of the literal imminent takeover of political institutions by a theocratic system (Maddox 2013a: 21). A fantasy of "absolute dominion" (Wolf 1993: 265) may

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[112] The romanticisation of the domestic and the subsequent feminist critique that emerged along with Betty Friedan's *The Feminist Mystique* (1963) is seen as derived primarily from a white, bourgeois context and point of view. It is therefore problematic as it "alienated many poor and working class women" (hooks 1983: 96). However, nostalgia for 'traditional femininity" as post-feminist sensibility should not be seen as excluding those from alternative backgrounds. Butler, as summarised by Gill, argues that "although post-feminist sensibility may be shaped by racialised contours, women of colour are not (necessarily) positioned outside its interpellations and invitations (Gill 2017: 613). Gill argues for an intersectional analysis that attempts to "think about power and difference non-reductively" (2017: 612).

[113] The question on how to conceptualise an alternative form of 'feminine power' that does not rely on control and dominance has been important to feminism (hooks 1984: 85-90).

[114] Another way of substituting a fantasy of power for true egalitarian pursuits may be the positioning of some women as being the 'saviours' of their 'victim sisters' as identified in Chapter 2.

therefore belong to Houston in a way that is more literal than in the minds of the participants. Whatever the motivations, this fantasy, while surfacing with force, is equally forcibly subdued. Rather than this conflict being submerged in the body work, however, this all forms part of the theatrics of the movement's construction of femininity. Symbolic or imaginary power becomes a substitute for power itself, while, as with the princess figuration, escapist fantasies are offered to make up for the ideological loss of the promise of power. Women are offered a non-power.

This strategy is one that has been tactically assimilated by mainstream culture in what Rosalind Gill (2015) and Angela McRobbie (2009) call the post-feminist climate or sensibility. Postfeminism, discussed again in the next chapter, is a way of 'undoing' feminism (McRobbie 2009), a trend Gill (2015) argues is still visible during the recently defined 'fourth wave' of feminism. McRobbie states that one theme is how gender de-traditionalisation is accompanied by "patterns of gender re-traditionalisation—i.e. "the introduction of traditional pre-feminist gender norms" (2009: 47), or in the Deleuzoguattarian sense, a "'deterritorialisation' of patriarchal power and its 'reterritorialisation'" (Gill 2015: 613). Gill states that a "distinctly postfeminist move" is "the use of a lexicon and iconography borrowed from activist feminism, yet put to work in the service of ideas and perspectives that apparently offer little or no real challenge to gender power relations" (2015: 623).

At the same time, as will be more broadly discussed in the upcoming chapter, the Christian belief in gender complementarity, which is still largely prevalent in Hillsong teachings, combined with the will to be 'world-affirming', solicits a simultaneous 'symbolic giving and strategic negation of power'. Briefly, gender complementarity is the theology that men and women have inherent and divinely ordained differences and that they therefore "should occupy different statuses and positions" (Gabaitse 2015: 8). Men are positioned as "heads of households and leaders in church while women offer supporting or lesser roles" (*ibid.*).

Tensions that may arise between the promise of feminine power and its substitute 'non-power' seem eased within the movement by 'playfully' incorporating this paradox into its representation of femininity. The message appears to suggest that the symbolic imbuement of power is enough, you can therefore relax, we won't expect too much of you. Power is played off against a girlish (and elitist) freedom from responsibility, emanating trends that continue to plague neo-feminist discourses (McRobbie 2009, Gill 2015). Reflective of a recurrent theme in the 2016 Colour Conference invitation, for example, we see an adult woman wearing a giant wire tiara and a long

voluptuous tutu accompanying a black T-shirt with 'Go Save The World' scrawled boldly in white across its front.[115]

McRobbie describes a post-feminist desire for both a 'girlishness' and unapologetic enjoyment of "traditional feminine pleasures" (2009: 21), both elements that feature strongly in the Colour Movement's articulation of femininity. One image that forms part of its 'Miss Sisterhood' campaign for girls shows three hands of different skin colour raised together in the iconic feminist 'fist' symbol, but here it displays a range of brightly-coloured nail varnish (Hillsong 2016: /miss-sisterhood-south-africa/). Of a very similar image in 'NEW GEN FEM', Gill writes that it "forms a suture between an earlier feminist radicalism and a female self-presentation style organised around girliness or traditional femininity" (2016). As McRobbie wryly notes, "there is a refrain repeated that 'girl is good'" and that women should not have to abandon the "terrain of enjoyable activities such as knitting and canning vegetables or decorating" (2009: 157-158).

3.2 Shopping as 'Mobilisation'

The "weapons of warfare" (i.e. the Colour Conference 'gifts') are further elaborated through a range of merchandise that is similarly construed as 'tools for activation'. Hillsong, in line with mega-church trends worldwide, is known for extending its 'reach' into daily life by offering a large range of products purchasable at their events or online (Wade 2015: 668). In the first chapter, I speak about the unrelenting on and off-stage presence of Houston's books during the 2017 conference and how this becomes a means of continually inserting the 'Self' onto the movement. The resources are also a way of inserting the movement into the everyday spaces of its followers. Wade argues that proliferation through merchandise helps to render Hillsong an 'enchanted institution' that is seemingly '*everywhere*' (2015: 668). In *Prosper, Consume and be Saved*, Marion Maddox states that Hillsong promotes a "theology of consumption"—consumerism not as a merely permissible endeavour, but as a religious duty (Maddox 2013b).[116]

A theology of 'flourishing' as an extension of what has become known as Pentecostalism's 'prosperity gospel' forms an integral part of how 'Sisterhood femininity' is defined. The notion of 'flourishing' is expanded on in the upcoming section; however, here I would like to draw attention to, as highlighted through Maddox and here in the words of Simon Coleman, a new 'Protestant ethic' that encourages rather than constrains "consumption without responsibility"—"economics not *of*

[115] Found: Found in the Mystery. [Colour Conference e-invitation]. [O]. Available: http://e.issuu.com/embed.html#1452032/31291636 [2018, October].
[116] In the next chapter I take a closer look at Hillsong and the Colour Sisterhood's consumer culture.

religion but *as* religion" (2011: 26). Maddox writes that "Hillsong women are literally born to shop—because not to shop is to thwart one's God-given destiny" (2013b: 5).

The hash-tag #shopBABYshop is listed by Houston as part of the 'flourish' ideal and its so-called "catchcry", #flourishBABYflourish (2016: 231).[117] More than evidencing a desired aspect of "Godly affluence" within its construction of 'transcendental femininity', the Colour Sisterhood's plethora of consumables (or as Houston calls them 'Sisterhood memories') are circumscribed through the 'feminist' rhetoric of mobilisation. In opening the second Sisterhood Session, Houston excitedly (2017) asks:

> We are choosing empathy in the name of Jesus Christ, amen? Has anyone bought the t-shirt yet? The beautiful, the hoody, the t-shirt—anyone wearing 'Choose Empathy'? Yes, just a few of you [looks slightly disappointed] Amen, I love it. We always seek to create memories and um, for want of a better word "merchandise" [makes hand quotation marks] don't really like that word, memories that incite conversation (00:28-00:55).

The website lists some of the Colour Sisterhood merchandise stating that they are about "making 'be the change' accessible to everyone" (Hillsong 2016: /it/colour/sisterhood/about/). Colour Sisterhood merchandise was available for purchase from stands in the so-called 'outer sanctuary' (the area before entering the main conference hall) during the 2017 conference, and is accessible through Hillsong's online shopping portal called Hillsong Store. As mentioned, participants were implored continually to buy Houston's books in order to 'understand' the Colour Sisterhood, notwithstanding that they cost more than a full day's work for many women in South Africa. The Colour Sisterhood products include books, journals, DVD packs, accessories such as make-up bags, handbags, mugs and pencils, and trendy apparel with boldly printed slogans and words familiar from the movement's rhetoric. Many of the items are listed with a short write-up that somehow, again, places the product as a 'tool for change'. The 'Wonder Kimono' for example, a salmon coloured silk gown with the word 'wonder' embroidered in black across front and back, reads: "Encourage those around you to wonder with this beautifully designed kimono, sure to compliment or heighten any outfit" (Hillsong Store s.a.: /wonder-kimono/). The black make-up bag with a print reading in white "The Story of Us, The Sisterhood" is described simply by stating "This chic bag is carrying a message of Sisterhood while carrying your make-up!" (Hillsong Store s.a.: /colour-make-up-bag/).

[117] In the 'countdown' to the 2018 Colour Conference, and reading like a television commercial, Hillsong Pheonix uses the hash-tag to urge women to spend during conference, stating "Colour Conference Twenty-18 is FOUR days away!!! Girls! Make sure you save some time throughout the day to check out the Colour Expo! Filled with brand new Colour apparel and resources, you won't want to miss out! #shopbabyshop #ColourConf" (Hillsongpheonix 2018).

Investing in the movement's merchandise is thus annotated not as an act of self-gratification but rather as a potential means of reaching 'beyond the self'. The act of 'purchasing' (for as Houston writes: "What woman doesn't feel the need for retail therapy?" (2016: 78)) becomes incentivised and sublimated by the promise of the facilitation of Hillsong activities in general, the "higher collective purpose" –saving the unsaved (Wade 2015: 669). In an Instagram post featuring a black 'Choose Empathy Tote Bag' and a Bible, Julia A' Bell, lead pastor of Hillsong Australia, writes: "These totes that were created for COLOUR...were never about 'colour merchandise'…Bobbie has always created 'opportunities' for us girls to share a greater Message. That's why I love this tote!" [118] The linking of feminine mobilisation to self-styling and luxury-spending is, again, a way of offering women a faux power, while, to this end, the myth itself becomes embellished with a power-fantasy.[119]

The effacing of women's power through relentless focus on 'the body', beauty, fashion, and idealised consumer habits has been a long-standing trend in popular culture (Wolf 2002). Wolf (2002) writes on how women's bodies have been commoditised to keep the hyper-consumerist culture machinery running.[120] Braidotti states that the climate of 'advanced capitalism' offers a type of "consumerist bulimia" or "schizophrenia" where you have to be "forever spending in excess" (Braidotti 2015: 27:00). Within the Colour movement, encouraging women to buy its products through 'spiritualised' 'swindling' may similarly serve its economic goals; however, the deeper message promulgates a 'privileged' femininity founded on 'flourishing'. Paradoxically, this aspect therefore appeals to both mainstream and neo-Pentecostal culture.[121]

3.3 Compulsory 'Flourishing'

The notion of 'flourishing' is a central, 'spiritualised' tenet within the movement's construction of femininity. The 'flourish' ideology, like the prosperity gospel, equates "spiritual success to material acquisition and physical well-being" (Coleman 2011, Maddox 2013b). In *The Sisterhood*, Houston emphasises the importance of 'flourishing', writing that "God's desire is that our lives flourish in such a stunning manner that they become a display of His goodness before all nations" (2016: 227). As

[118] Julesabell.2017. [O]. Available: https://www.instagram.com/p/BXyh3iph8Y4/?tagged=coloursisterhood [2018, April]

[119] This is not to say that women do not have power as consumers. Hooks (1984) and Wolf (1993) call on women to exercise their consumer power through activities such as boycotts, calling on advertisers to include 'goodwill programmes' and reforming advertising to become a tool for shaping feminist subjectivities.

[120] The Colour Sisterhood movement's perspective on beauty and appearance in examined in the next chapter.

[121] Neo-Pentecostalism, in contrast to classical Pentecostalism and its focus on "salvation through confession" idealises (or idolises) "miraculous healing, deliverance and success" (through prosperity teachings) and sometimes "bizarre church performances" (Khanyile in Kgatle 2017). They are also described as "trans-denominational…socially relevant, unorthodox, non-dogmatic and cosmopolitan" (*ibid.*).

argued of 'the creative' in Chapter 1, 'flourishing' is seen as a translation of 'spiritual desire' into earthly terms.

Wade writes that 'self-development' and the alignment of personal 'purpose' to that of the Church are important aspects of the prosperity doctrine (Wade 2016: 663). The 'flourish' ideology similarly incorporates an aspect of 'labour'; Houston exhorts the Sisterhood: "if it is within your power (which it is, sweetheart), live life magnificently. Your example will inspire and bear fruit that will reach far into eternity. Imagine that" (2016: 254). Labouring to flourish is extended beyond mere self-improvement by being narrated as an act of 'mobilisation'. In fact, it is construed as the divinely ordained foundation for transformative influence. Attributing its genesis to "a second God-whisper", Houston introduces the flourish ideology by transcribing the message she received from God:

> When you get up at the very end to pray and farewell the girls, I want you to tell them something. I want you to tell them to go home and flourish. They want to make a difference; they want to be the change in the world; and if they go home and flourish, they will (Houston 2016: 229).

Later on, she states: "Indeed, if we were all to grow and flourish, the world would certainly be a better place. How wonderful that God would ...kiss our lives with such a truth-worthy commission" (Houston 2016: 231).

Advocated in this way, 'flourishing' therefore becomes a compulsory aspect of the ideal Colour Sisterhood femininity—a new 'ascesis of lavishness'. On the one hand, it is defined as 'simply' meaning that "there is a better way in Christ" (Houston 2016: 234). But, more than the promise of a spiritual or subjective strength no matter what life may bring your way (which would be in line with Apostolic teaching), the potential 'empowering' element of this discourse is subdued by its coupling to mainstream signifiers for 'success', such as the #shopbabyshop hash-tag. On the other hand, 'flourishing' is also a term that is vaguely defined within the movement, using predominantly (feminised) analogies of gardens or 'flowers blooming' in both the narrative and visual constructs of the word (Houston 2016: 224-235). What it truly means to 'flourish' is therefore left largely open to interpretation.

Testifying to how this notion may, however, come to signify transformation 'on the body' (through wealth and physical well-being') within the minds of its participants, is a blog post on the Hillsong website by Carolyn Greenhalgh, entitled 'Flourish' (Hillsong 2016: /colour/blog/2013/09/flourish/#.W8ubYnszaUk). Greenhalgh talks about how a 'flourish baby flourish' t-shirt she bought during a Colour Conference "convicted" her that she was not

flourishing—"especially in the area of my health" (Greenhalgh in Hillsong 2016: /colour/blog/2013/09/flourish/#.W8ubYnszaUk). This revelation led her to join a gym, "fall in love with fitness", follow a healthy eating plan, shrink to a size 12-14, raise funds for trafficked women through running races, and eventually decide on a career path in fitness (*ibid.*).

While Greenhalgh seems to be 'empowered' by the message of 'flourishing', the automatic linking of this ideal to a certain standard of bodily and financial success may instead render this message disparaging to many women.[122] Firstly, failure to achieve the perceived goals of 'flourishing' may render a women's status as 'lesser than', both as a spiritual and a feminine being. Lioy states that "a lack of faith is labelled as one reason why Christians fail to be healed, enjoy abundant wealth, and so on (2007: 44)". McRobbie describes via Pierre Bourdieu how "symbolic violence" accompanies the creation of new hierarchies of taste and style" (2009: 127)—women are scrutinised for failing to achieve the new normative standards for 'femininity' as dictated by a 'dominant group' (2009: 128-130).[123]

Subsequently, this ideology would dichotomise those who are perceived as presiding over the aspect of flourishing (whether earned by hard work or due to privilege), again, as 'Sisterhood Saviours', and those who fall short of this standard (even due to biological or socio-cultural circumstances) as 'victim others'. To flourish seems to be a highly individualised gesture—women are expected to 'flourish' amid family or other crises (Houston 2016: 230)—to be 'hundred-fold girls' (Houston 2016; 141)—negating the role played by social circumstances as well as social support networks in defining women's experience. This trend is equally visible in mainstream Western culture that has substituted hyper-individuality for support networks and the bonds formed through interdependence (McRobbie 2009). Falling short of the 'standards of success', women are left to "self-blame" (McRobbie 2009; 15, 752-73), the brunt of which is felt among those who are 'predisposed' to that which is seen as 'failure'. The rhetoric goes that women "of different ethnic and social backgrounds...are invited to recognise themselves as privileged subjects of social change" (McRobbie 2009: 58). Poor women are expected to emulate their social superiors (McRobbie 2009: 130), and they may therefore be 'condemned' for being "unable or unwilling to help themselves" (McRobbie 2009: 73).[124]

[122] This was the only blog post I could find included by Hillsong on 'flourishing' specifically.
[123] As we shall see in the next chapter, physical appearance is highly regarded in the movement and young girls are taught to strive for mainstream standards of beauty as a form of 'empowerment'.
[124] The plethora of 'self-help-style' resources authored by Bobbie (and Brian Houston) may, as stated by McRobbie in context of mainstream culture, server as "the new forms of individualised guidance now available to facilitate these practices of responsibility" (2009: 45).

The feminine 'habitus' established through the rhetoric of 'flourishing' within the Colour Sisterhood normalises the social, cultural and ideological positions occupied by those in the dominant field.[125] Pierre Bourdieu describes how social class is constructed through "those who occupy the dominated positions within social space" being also permitted by these positions to dominate the "field of symbolic production" (Bourdieu 1985: 735). A very small group or single person may therefore impart their views and subsequently a new 'habitus' on a large social group (while the social group in turn endows them with this privilege—this is a kind of 'social-magic') (Bourdieu 1985).[126] Bordieu states that the social structure, defined through cultural, social and symbolic capital implies the acceptance of "the social world as it is, to take it for granted, rather than rebel against it, to counterpose to it different, even antagonistic, possibilities"—it is a "tacit acceptance of one's place, a sense of limits" (Bourdieu 1985: 778).[127] Also, every "member of the group is...instituted as a custodian of the limits of the group...he can modify the group by modifying the limits of legitimate exchange through some form of misalliance" (Bourdieu 1986: 52).

I use Bourdieu here in trying to understand the 'intent' driving normalising language such as that of flourishing. As argued by Butler (1999) and Braidotti (2008b), however, power is rarely one-way and is often found in its true, unrecognised forms at the margins. Rendering 'flourishing' as the first step in having the 'power to affect change', as done within the Colour Sisterhood's discourse, abnegates the power outside of the dominant field. Hooks, for example, calls for the recognition of the "forms of power held by exploited and oppressed groups" (hooks 1984: 90), stating that "one of the most significant forms of power held by the weak is 'the refusal to accept the definition of oneself that is put forward by the powerful'" (*ibid.*). "Women need to know that they can reject the powerful's definition of their reality---they can do so even if they are poor, exploited, or trapped in oppressive circumstances" (*ibid.*). Returning to the notion of 'the politics of location', Braidotti notes via Adrienne Rich the "importance of situating oneself in the specificity of one's social, ethnic, class, economic, and sexual reality" (1994: 268).

Also, as discussed in Chapter 2, and here in the words of Hassim, "perhaps ironically, the most vibrant and creative forms of collective solidarity are emerging at this level, as women seek to

[125] Hooks notes for example how the equating of "psychological pain with material deprivation" is a tool to "de-emphasise class privilege" (1984: 60).
[126] In her critical assessment of Bourdieu, Butler writes that "he understands social conventions as animating the bodies which, in turn, reproduce and ritualise those conventions as practices...the habitus is formed, but it is also formative" (1999b: 116).
[127] For Bourdieu, capital, more than economic capital, takes various forms within social fields. This may include bodily or verbal manners, tastes, cultural objects, ceremonies or occasions (Bourdieu 1986).

address everyday crises with few resources" (Hassim 2005).[128] Rhizomatic relations of interconnectedness with others "are not dependent on the terrain, but are actively engaged in the creation of alternative social relations and other possible worlds" (Braidotti 2008b: 4). At the same time, Braidotti argues for the "productive nature of abnormality, of what falls outside the norm, or the normal and desirable ideal"—"others, alien, external foreign, monstrous or unfamiliar looking others are the site of powerful promises, of creative potential, of staggering new combinations" (2008: 12).

Finally, 'flourishing as mobilisation' is an elitist-defined fantasy where the inherently privileged condition of some (often an impediment to transformatory politics) being narrated as a divine marker for grace as well as agency, is not only 'justified' but celebrated. Privileged women are free to remain comfortably passive and complacent regarding 'the way things are' by being told that privilege underlies or even constitutes influence. This ideology becomes a mask for the movement's complicity with certain trends in the dominant sphere (the next chapter offers more on this). It also 'speaks' to the crowd it wishes to please.

In essence, the message dismisses how radical, demanding and painful processes that often accompany in-depth transformation are (Braidotti 2008b: 8). "Transformative ethics involves a radical repositioning on the part of the knowing subject, which is neither simple, self-evident, nor free of pain"—achieving change means "disidentifying ourselves from familiar and hence comforting values and identities" (Braidotti 2008b: 9).

3.4 Ritualising 'Mobilisation'

Mobilisation' within the Colour Sisterhood is defined largely in terms of individual rather than collective gesture. In *The Sisterhood*, Houston states that the ethos of the Colour Conference is to "create strategies where the girls can return home to their own settings and mobilise response from there" (2016: 150). We've already seen similar rhetoric in the excerpts above, and I will continue to draw attention to this in this section. Rather than necessitated by the movement's forms of mobilisation, *collective* action is substituted by and theatrically performed through collective 'rites'.[129] One such rite centres on the notion of individual 'financial giving' as form of 'collective action'.

In closing the second Sisterhood Session, Houston urges the audience and on-stage participants to place "coins" in each other's Sisterhood 'money tins' (Houston 2017b). These were distributed on

[128] On the other hand, as Braidotti notes, the "very settled, anchored, sedentary people are amongst the least empathic, the least easily moved, the most self-consciously "apolitical" (1994: 35).
[129] The worship ritual and the ritualising of the invitation as discussed in the first chapter are examples of this.

the conference seats prior to the session. Prompted by Houston's example the audience proceeded to simultaneously shake the tins, creating a unifying 'white noise' that loudly permeated the hall. While the background music intensified along with the sound of the money tins Houston (2017c: 58:07) declared:

> See, basically this sound could be the sound of freedom for someone. Because we all just play a part, we all just do something. Can't do everything but we can do something. And if you actually took this tin, and you set on your bench or your desk at work...and you consistently put something in there, you can actually start a miracle for someone. And this could actually become the sound of freedom for a trafficked girl. This could become the sound of education for a young woman on the continent of Africa, because, you know what, we are going to pay attention to her literacy. This could be the sound of freedom for a family in Northern Europe who need food on their table. This could be the sound of anything you desire.

The 2017 'Sisterhood tin' is a small white object with a depositing slit for coins and covered in printed labels. Similar to the printed invitation, the tin is ritualised to become a totemic object symbolising the notion of financial mobilisation, one that can be inserted into the day-to-day physical spaces of its participants. Houston tells the participants to place the tin in their home or workplace as a visible reminder of their resolve to give.[130]

As with the Colour Conference invitations, the tins regularly featured in photographs. The audience is shown engaging with the object in various ways—caressing it, holding it up in the air or praying with it. A page on the Colour Sisterhood website is dedicated to the object and the title "Sisterhood Tins: The Sound of Freedom" reinforces the auditory component—the deafening sound of a collective 'action'. In a video clip sharing the "Tin Moment" from one of the 2017 conferences, Houston emphatically states that:

> This is the sound of hope, this is the sound of revival, this is the sound of freedom...the sound of rescue, the sound that says we care, we empathise, we lean in, we identify with your plight, with your struggle, with your difficulty. This is the sound of a company of women who are saying you are not alone, you are not forgotten, you are not passed over. This is the sound that we shake over the continents of the earth.[131]

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[130] Houston,B. 2017c. *Sisterhood Tins: The Sound of Freedom*. [O]. Available: https://hillsong.com/it/collected/blog/2017/07/sisterhood-tins-the-sound-of-freedom/#.Wpk6nWpuaUk [2018: February]

[131] *Ibid.*

As the 'sound' and music intensifies the audience in an emotional gesture rise to their feet while continuing to shake their tins fervently and lift them in the air. Houston quiets the atmosphere with a smile and an 'amen'.

Figure 8: Hillsong (The Sisterhood Tin: The Sounds of Freedom) 2017.
(Hillsong 2016: pb/collected/blog/2017/07/sisterhood-tins-the-sound-of-freedom/#.WtIWGy5uaUk)

The small 'Sisterhood tin' (fig. 8) concretises the abstract notion of 'giving' through an object that can be experienced through touch, seeing, and sound, and ultimately hopes to bring about 'larger' investments into the various aid programmes listed by the movement. It is presented as a simple, tangible, easily-accessible and easily-gratifiable means of activism, where even 'small change' can be converted into something 'world-changing' (Houston 2017d).

In *The Sisterhood*, Houston relates how "many...grew their seeds into amounts they never would have imagined possible" and that "possibly millions of dollars were raised" in response to the "commissioned money"—the small change they had received from one another in their tins (Houston 2016:152-153). The theme of 'growing your [money tin] seeds' appears reiterated in the 'Colour Sisterhood stand', a striking space in black and white dedicated to the facilitation of financial contributions. Here, in contrast to the small object in hand, the money tin now features prominently

in the decor as large, white tin cans used for tables that carry information sheets on 'avenues for giving'.

We may imagine that the conceptual role the 'money tin' plays in promoting financial investment owes partly to its quality of 'reduction'—of making smaller, more 'accessible', tangible and experience-able the vast ideological notion of financial activism. Claude Levi-Strauss writes of ritual objects and art objects that "the virtue of reduction of scale" of the 'grand concept' ("the paintings of the Sistine Chapel...[as] a small-scale model...[of] the End of Time") means that the "object itself seems less formidable"—we overcome resistance to it (1962:23). This notion of 'reductive ritual' is almost scripted into the 'money tin moment' when Houston (2016: 206) writes: "Who could have imagined that the...rattle of coins in a can could become the deafening sounds of freedom? They did…With devoted precision, we laboured to *remove every fear or excuse* and upskill the least likely (and the most likely) so that together we could make a difference" (my emphasis).

Inversely, the money tin ritual may shroud passive or individual-driven mobilisation in, what Emile Durkheim referred to as "collective effervescence" (Shilling and Mellor 1998: 196) as a way to sublimate the notion of 'Colour Sisterhood mobilisation'. This ritual allows for an 'embodiment' at the "collective level" through an activity that causes a shared sensory or emotional arousal or experience (Shilling and Mellor 1998: 196). Through the unified act of 'shaking' the object, the resulting sound and emotional responses, the prayers, and the manner in which these effects are repeated across the various spaces (physical and virtual), the childlike individual action of placing coins in a tin becomes enchanted and mythicised in the Colour Conference environment. The movement therefore creates a pleasurable pathos as legitimating agent—a spiel of collective mobilisation where, as I will continue to describe, this very factor is missing.

3.5 Financial Giving

Ritual practices may become catalysts for feminist mobilisation (Braidotti 2008a, Longman 2018) when they allow individuals to enter into "modes of relation with multiple others", creating "possible worlds by mobilising resources that have been left untapped, including our desires and imagination" (Braidotti 2008a: 15-16). It may be difficult to determine whether or not rituals concretise in "actual, material relations" (Braidotti 2008a:15); however, beyond these kinds of displays, there seems to be a clear lack of effort on the part of the movement in fostering solidarity and, through that, a collective action among its members.

The onus falls on participants to 'do what they can'. The movement distances itself from defining its collective 'interests' or mobilising its constituencies, as called for by Hassim, in support of those

interests, but takes a purely motivational position. Mostly, this motivation centres on giving financially to any of a selection of mostly 'external projects', that are, however, at least loosely associated with the movement. Called the 500 Projects, these partnered NGOs from across the world target a variety of needs, including refugee support, human trafficking intervention, and illiteracy. Houston states on these projects that "many women come to Colour and they want to make a difference but they have no pathways or avenues to do that" (Houston in *Sisterhood Session 2* 2017: 04:10). She continues that "the concept surrounding the number '500' is simply that "we broke it down and made it extremely doable for everyone, and so basically the 500 project represents raising awareness and then finance to the tune of 500 dollars, or 500 pound, or 500 rand, can actually bring change in someone's life" (Houston in *Sisterhood Session 2* 2017: 04:41).[132]

'Giving' is facilitated through the movement's various platforms that ensure the process is simplified and that funds are easily channelled. Avoiding any vagueness around the notion of 'mobilising financially' the movement offers clear steps and straightforward donation plans often dictated by Houston through the conference and easily accessed through its website, as well as printed material at the conference. Financial activation is upheld as a primary means of mobilisation for 'Sisterhood' women, almost outweighing active involvement by other means. Houston writes:

> Those who raise awareness or enlarge their capacity to be financial supporters are critical because the highways and byways of lost and hurting humanity cost money. It costs nothing except compassion and time to engage a person in the gutter, but creating effective pathways out of the gutter for that person is another story (Houston 2016: 207).

The on-stage introduction to the 500 projects was limited to Houston pointing out the list appearing on the screen, while further information could be found in black-and-white printed 'booklets' (printed A4 pages stapled together) at the Colour Sisterhood stall in the 'outer sanctuary'. Other than Phil Dooley appearing on-stage in non-related contexts, no representatives of the movements were present on-stage. The broader 'theme' for 2017 was the 'global refugee crisis'.

[132] Most of the 500 projects seemed to be intimately connected to either the Colour Sisterhood or Hillsong, being either founded from or within the movements or by pastors who are part of the broader Pentecostal denominations: ACC (Australian Christian Churches) of whom Brian Houston was president for many years, or the World Assemblies of God Fellowship. In 2018, the drop down list of possible projects for contribution offered by the Coloured Sisterhood website were narrowed down to five, all founded from within these organisations. The Colour Sisterhood and Hillsong often feature their founders as 'visiting pastors' and the Hillsong and Sisterhood websites dedicate pages to these movements. The projects' own websites emulate those of Hillsong in design and narrative. Most striking are the bold, professional photographs and movement images, and the simplified infographics enjoying similar layouts to those of Hillsong.

The 'face' of the movement's 'call to action' during 2017 and 2018 became that of an anonymous, emotional, male refugee, holding his seven-month-old baby. The image appears on the background of the Colour Sisterhood 'About' page.[133] During the 2017 second Sisterhood Session this image was displayed largely across the screen in the background, and a significant portion of the performance was dedicated to the story behind the image.

The Second Sisterhood session, like the first, could have offered a site for bringing together local initiatives and voices around 'mobilisation'. With more than a million asylum applicants registered over the last decade in South Africa, the local context provides a plethora of initiatives around aid, legislature and counter-xenophobic awareness.[134] In terms of women's needs in South Africa, possible sites of resistance are extensive, and non-political movements have proved effective in advocating change. Hassim writes how, for example, a vast number of ground-level women's organisations have actively been easing the burdens of the HIV/AIDS epidemic through "welfare work, caring for the ill, organising and financing funerals...[and] mobilising at community level against rapists" (Hassim 2005). Another example is how emerging social movements "are challenging...perceived weaknesses in the justice system" around women's issues in South Africa" (*ibid.*). Women have also rallied together around political support for "poor and vulnerable people" calling for "accountability in public spending" and "that the constitutional values of equality and social justice are upheld" (*ibid*.).[135] Other than individual, financial activation, these kinds of collective, 'hands-on' tactics are invaluable if real changes are to be brought about in local contexts.

3.6 Prayer and Cyber Space

Socio-political issues for local contexts, such as those listed above, are sometimes expounded to the Colour Sisterhood framed as 'matters for prayer'. The movement affiliates activism with prayer by stating that "the [prayer] initiative has been instrumental in engaging every-day girls with the message of sisterhood and making it accessible for everyone to get involved" (Thambiratnam in Hillsong 2016: /colour/sisterhood/about). Houston writes that the Sisterhood 'strategy' surrounding victims of human trafficking "would take the form of fervent, effectual, authoritative prayer" (2016:214). To this end, the movement presents a collection of ' Sisterhood Prayer Maps' (Houston 2016: 214), described as means to "mobilise girls to pray in a strategic way" (Thambiratnam in Hillsong 2016: /colour/sisterhood/about). These 'maps', also referred to as 'regional prayer guides',

[133] Hillsong Colour. s.a. [O]. Available: https://hillsong.com/fr/colour/sisterhood/ [2018:Feb]
[134] Mashile, B. 2016. Asylum Statistics: Department Home Affairs Briefing; Immigration Amendment Bill 2016 Deliberations. [O]. Available: https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/22163/ [2018, October]
[135] Often within these organisations (and within the Colour Sisterhood movement), however, there has been little articulation of male social and cultural power (Hassim 2005).

offer descriptions on grouped regions including on their geographies, climates, natural resources and histories, as selection of 'key statistics', and a summary on various 'challenges' pertaining to that region.[136] [137] Houston describes that the 'maps' enable women to "pray with intelligent understanding" with prayers "aimed at the source of the problems" (Houston 2016: 215).

Prayer is a central part of the Pentecostal tradition (Griffith 1997: 29-30), and can perhaps be seen as "the chief and most tangible practice wherein participants' social and religious identities are constituted" (Griffith 1997: 75). Literature from various Christian traditions discerning between the prayers of men, with titles such as *What God Does When Men Pray* (1993) by Bill Peel and William Carr Peel and *What Happens When Women Pray* by Evelyn Christenson testifies to how prayer can be gendered in order to become a culture-forming agent.

'Women's prayer', forming a much more proliferated category, is often conceptually linked to feminine 'empowerment'. We see this in the description for *The Incredible Power of a Praying Woman* (2002) by Nicholas Duncan-Williams, where the description reads that "the woman has a sensitised spiritual aptitude that when used in prayer creates incredible power!", and in titles such as *Fervent: A Woman's Battle Plan to Serious and Strategic Prayer* (2015) by Priscilla Shirer.[138] In *When Women Pray: Eleven Catholic Women on the Power of Prayer*, Kathryn Jean Lopez writes:

> When women pray, hearts are turned toward God. When women pray, "Do whatever he tells you" becomes plausible. When women pray, peace becomes real, wounds can be healed. When women pray, lives are saved (Lopez 2017: 100).

She argues that women are called to, through prayer, "save the peace of the world" (Lopez 2017: 99).

A similar message is performed at the 2016 Colour Conference. Set against a large digital display of bright pink aviator-wings, bold type (also in pink) displays the Biblical message that "when two of you get together, on anything at all on earth, and make a prayer of it, my father in heaven goes into

[136] Houston, B. s.a. Sisterhood Fight Club #MIDDAYBABYMIDDAY: Western & South Africa. [O]. Available: https://d9nqqwcssctr8.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/02113353/5WesternSouthernAfrica.pdf [2018, October]

[137] The 'prayer guide' for 'Western and Southern Africa', for example, describe the abduction of girls by Boko Haram, give statistics on the aids epidemic, talk of drought and poverty afflicting South Africa and surrounds as well as child trafficking and the persecution of Christians in certain areas.

[138] Google Books. The Incredible Power of a Praying Woman. [Book description]. [O]. Available: https://books.google.co.za/books/about/The_Incredible_Power_of_a_Praying_Woman.html?id=G8wRQgAACAAJ&source=kp_book_description&redir_esc=y [2018, October]

action"—"overwhelming victory is ours".[139] While the Biblical message is meant for all humankind, the overwhelming use of pink is clearly meant to add a gender-element here. This rhetoric culminates in a bold, pink, san serif rendering of the word 'pray' alternating in English, French, Russian and Chinese (languages that may provocatively conjure images of historical 'revolution'). In the foreground an 'army' of women (multiplied digitally ad infinitum) wearing 'Rosie the Riveter factory uniforms' with sleeves 'rolled up', and carrying large flags, dance and 'march' in perfect unison to a version of Rachel Platten's 'Fight Song'.[140]

Ending the performance, the hash-tag #middaybabymidday fills the digital screen. This forms part of a series of hash-tags calling Colour Sisterhood women to daily prayer, others being #sisterhoodfightclub, #setyouralarm, #bethechange, and #prayingfortheworld (Hillsong 2016: /colour/sisterhood/fightclub/). The hash-tags relay the traditional spiritual act of 'prayer' into the contemporary world of online-driven 'activism'. Via social media posts, women are encouraged to pray for 'world events, disasters and crises' (mainly the events that are highly publicised globally), that are summarised as 'prayer initiatives' by the movement. [141]

The 'alliance' between 'women's prayer' and new technology is narrated as being particularly transformative. The Colour Sisterhood website states that "through social media this initiative continues to build and take shape as women make it their personal revelation to 'let prayer do the heavy lifting'. Over 11 000 posts on Instagram have used the hash-tag as girls from all over the world have taken the challenge to pray" (Hillsong 2018: /it/colour/sisterhood/about/). Stories within *The Sisterhood* attempt to frame the success of online-driven prayer (however, Houston states that "only heaven will truly measure what happens when we pray' (2016: 216)). In the chapter section titled 'God Bless Instagram', for example, Houston describes how her Instagram and Twitter posts and the

[139] Eternity Project. Hillsong Women's Colour Conference 2016 Fight Song. [Footage of Performance]. [O]. Available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h5bonk8cT48 [2018, October]

[140] As R. Marie Griffith notes "notions pertaining to spiritual warfare [i.e. through prayer] have a long history in millennial theology and evangelicasm and are rooted in scriptural passages such as the following: 'Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the power of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6: 11-12, NIV)" (1997: 192).

[141] An example from their Instagram account reads: "Today begins the fifth month of our regional focus for the Sisterhood Fight Club. Grab your map, scratch off #5 and let's begin praying as a company of people for Western and Southern Africa. The Women Peace and Security Network Africa (WIPSEN-Africa) is a women-led, pan-Africa NGO that aims to champion women's strategic participation and leadership within peace and security governance in Africa. This is a strong, positive step towards gender equality in the region and is an example of the brave women who run our family...Today we're praying for women in this region who bravely fight for peace, safety and women's empowerment" (Hillsong 2016: /fr/colour/sisterhood/fightclub/september/).

prayer that followed from these facilitated the miraculous rescuing of a Kazakhstani girl (Houston 2016: 217).

R. Marie Griffith argues for the transformational potential in prayer rituals for women, stating that it "opens up possibilities for new worlds to be imagined and lived and thus may open the way for vital transformation of another, more concrete and potentially more radical, order" (1997: 79). She describes how, through prayer, women's "sense of their own lives is transformed" making 'pain' more bearable and allowing "new possibilities for identity [to] emerge within old constraints" (Griffith 1997: 75-76). Her rhetoric focuses on personal, subjective 'transformation' or the therapeutic qualities of women's prayer even when cited in relation to testimonies of 'prayer-driven miracles'. Chia Longman (2018) and Braidotti (2008a) similarly argue that women's collective 'spiritual ritual practices', taking place in 'women's only spaces' may be transformative in forging 'outward interconnections'. Longman argues for the "feminist potential" of such practices by drawing attention to their ability to "move beyond mere introspection and personal empowerment" in what she describes as the "multiplier effect"—women reaching beyond these movements to create other networks with affective potential (2018: 14).

The midday Sisterhood prayer 'ritual', driven across cyberspace, does not, however, necessitate a gathering. Rather, it is set up in a way that instead inserts the ritual into the everyday—accessible from your computer or smart devices and performed in the quiet of your home or workplace (unless you start your own 'prayer group', like 'Maggie' who is mentioned in *The Sisterhood* (Houston 2016: 219-220)). Inserting sacrament into the everyday, especially in terms of domestic labour (seen as repetitive and non-progressive) seems to be both a historical and contemporary theme within Christian discourse, avowed by the array of blog posts with titles such as 'Finding God in Housework' and 'Viewpoint. Housework Can Be a Source of Profound Spirituality' as well as in books like Kathleen Norris' *The Quotidian Mysteries: Laundry, Liturgy, and "Women's Work"* (1947). The message is, again, that women need not 'venture' far from their traditional or privileged roles in order to exercise a form of power. In fact, women are told that their participation in prayer as 'the highest form of power', being able to 'direct the power of God', is the highest possible calling, and therefore little else in terms of 'action' is warranted.[142] Houston writes that "I guess the bad guys had no idea that they were outnumbered by a host of housewives with [prayer]map in hand and a fierce determination to foil their plans and ambush the enemy at his own game" (2016: 210). While this statement seems meant as a humorous paradox, we are left to wonder why no equal

[142] This message appeals to the traditional hierarchical construction of gender and the belief within Pentecostal discourse that women are called to firstly be 'wives and mothers' and by implication still prone to function primarily within the domestic sphere (Griffith 1997).

recognition is given to those women who are proactively engaged in everyday struggles and sites of transformation.

Cyber 'activism' itself has been attractive to women because of its ease of incorporation into daily lived spaces. The notion of a "fully connected room of one's own" has appealed to some feminists for subverting a territory that has traditionally been marked by patriarchal power (de Castro Ferreira 2015). The advocacy of forms of feminist 'cyber-activism' almost always calls attention to its ability to dissolve borders (spatial, temporal, social, subjective and biological) in forging new connections. Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* (1985) was largely responsible for the theorising of a relationship between a feminist 'cyber consciousness and 'cyberspace' (Sandoval 2000) as the technologically-enabled "open door to every consciousness" (Fanon in Sandoval 2000: 384).[143] Braidotti commends "global technological developments" for bringing forth "new forms of inter-relationality" (2008:12). She writes:

> Contemporary technologies allow for forms of social interaction by desiring subjects, which are nomadic, not unitary; multi-relational, not phallo-centric; connective, not dialectical; simulated, not spectacular; affirmative, not melancholy and relatively disengaged from a linguistically mediated system of signification (Braidotti 2008a: 12).

Online feminism has been lauded as a "turning point" for feminism for its "great potential for broadly disseminating feminist ideas, shaping new modes of discourse about gender and sexism, connecting different [feminist] constituencies, and allowing creative modes of protest to emerge" (Baer 2016: 18).

Digital networks, as a form of "mass self-communication", is therefore seen as a potential site for "the expansion and linkage of emotional states which coordinate collective action" (de Castro Ferreira 2015). In line with Hassim's argument on the inclusion of non-political institutions as part of the discourse on the broader feminist movement in South Africa, we can think of cyberspace as a "discursive field of action" (de Castro Ferreira 2015) that may create solidarities based on, as called for by Braidotti via Foucault and Deleuze, a pragmatic "affirmative modes of inter-relation, generative forces and values" (2008b: 3).

As with aspects of the movement already discussed, however, the movement's digital platforms, rather than offering progressive 'sites' for the interactive creation of diverse, rhizomatic connections

[143] Cyberspace as "other zone for consciousness and behaviour that is being proposed from many locations and from across disciplines" was seen as "the praxis most able to both confront and homeopathically resist postmodern cultural conditions" (Sandoval 2000: 377). It is "schizophrenic", "rhizomatic", and "nomadic" in nature (Sandoval 2000:376).

and creative 'feminist' actions, are a one-way (top-down) channel of communication. There are no platforms created that facilitate user-interaction, and while the movement's online 'posts' for raising awareness are bountiful and take a 'broad' look at many issues world-wide, it fails to use them to formulate cohesive campaigns with specific, articulated outcomes, other than suggesting individuals 'pray'. Essentially, it is a single voice that is encountered in the virtual space, and while time and resources are seemingly not spared in ensuring constant 'updates', professional footage and photographs etc., they are not allocated to the production of conversational online 'spaces' such as for example *participatory* hash-tag initiatives for awareness raising, 'live q&a sessions' or other forms of online discussions. Where conversation may have erupted spontaneously through the 'comments' left on their various social media space, there seems to be no effort to engage with individuals, whether members or non-members in this way.

Rather than leading to action, setting prayer and cyber-activism up as counter-parts seems once again to statically substitute fulfilment of promised feminine power. This initiative, as the others already described, addresses the audience as a primarily bourgeois or elite group of women. The diverse potential that may be found within its membership and mobilised is sacrificed in order to maintain control of idealised constructions of what 'Sisterhood women' are, and ought to be. The next chapter continues this examination.

Conclusion

An issue that was not addressed in the body of this chapter is how, within the discourse for 'Colour Sisterhood mobilisation', there is a deafening silence around the subject of patriarchal power. Feminism seeks firstly to raise awareness of and then challenge power relations as they arise in socio-political as well as representational contexts. This being said, my attempt was to discover whether there may be possible sites of resistance arising from the movement's apparent 'philanthropic endeavours'. As highlighted in the introduction, and reminded of here, I conduct my analysis from the premise, as argued for by Hassim, that forms of "associational life that provide solidarity networks for women"—and their often 'unspectacular' or 'non-political' activities—may forge consciousness that may be mobilised" (Hassim 2004: 4).

While the focus is on humanitarian causes, the movement appropriates feminist symbols in articulating its forms of 'mobilisation' as 'feminine 'power'. The rhetoric theatrically dispatches 'mobilisation' as a collective, revolutionary act of resistance. At the same time, this rhetoric retreats into the familiar realms of traditional notions of 'women's naturalised passivity' and therefore frames mobilisation accordingly, sullying the very message it so fervently proclaims. The concurrent

hankering for and disarticulation of power, means that there is always an element of 'lack' present in how the movement defines women's agency.

As we have seen in previous chapters, the careful scripting of the conferences, and the control maintained by Houston as its founder, allows little freedom for lines of flight to an 'outside'. Defining activation primarily as women's supporting of initiatives within the parameters of the 'distant global' also means that, rather than driving the rallying together of women around local needs or issues, the rhetoric instead construes its 'mobilisation' as individual gestures (shopping, 'flourishing', funding and prayer) that need little movement away from the confines or comforts perceived as being inherent to the lives of the women it addresses.

The apparent 'avenues' for mobilisation presented by the movement have in common that none of them require the participant to go through a process of transformation themselves—unless your social, physical or economic condition means that you fall outside the prescribed 'ideal' for womanhood. 'Colour Sisterhood womanhood' becomes a monolith—one that is redrawn via the habitual forms of representation that are already in place. Braidotti, via Deleuze and Foucault, makes a distinction between 'morality' as "the implementation of established protocols and sets of rules" and "the ethical good", which instead "enacts empowering modes of becoming" (2008b.). She calls for embrace of the sometimes painful, yet joyful process of subjective processes of "creative-becoming" (Braidotti 2008b). In line with Biblical Apostolic teaching, Braidotti claims that:

> Affirmative ethics is not about the avoidance of pain, but rather about transcending the resignation and passivity that ensue from being hurt, lost and dispossessed...Taking pain into account is the starting point, the aim of the process, however—is the quest for ways of overcoming the effects of passivity, the paralysis brought by pain. The qualitative leap through and across pain is the gesture that actualises affirmative ways of becoming (2008b: 3).

In contrast, the notion of 'flourishing' (being healthy, successful, and generally not being in a state of conflict, struggle or turmoil) underlies both the Colour Sisterhood's construction of femininity and its renditions of feminine activation, which paradoxically creates a highly restraining effect. Through 'compulsive flourishing' being set at the core of women's empowerment, women are denied the potential that accompanies the processes, experiences and environments that may cause 'pain'. Hassim argues that "the linkages between cultural experiences of gender and the everyday struggles

of poor families and communities to survive" often furnish the driving power "impelling women to political action" (Hassim 2004: 2004).

Solidarity should not, as Ahmed writes, "assume that our struggles are the same struggles, or that our pain is the same pain, or that our hope is for the same future" (2004: 189). "Solidarity involves commitment, and work, as well as the recognition that even if we do not have the same feelings, or the same lives, or the same bodies, we do live on common ground" (Ahmed 2004: 189). Clare Hemmings (2012) calls for affective solidarity, that begins by recognising an affective dissonance (as an alternative to 'empathy' being the foundation)—i.e. the knowledge of 'different knowings'. This means "an account of experience that is dynamic rather than essentialising" (2012: 158).

The individualising of mobilisation as primary means of activation, as apparent in what is offered in terms of 'pathways' for this pursuit, also side-steps the potential for inward-and-outward bound transformation that comes from forging dynamic and diverse connections. While women are encouraged to 'go forth' and create their own initiatives and networks around the humanitarian projects laid out by the movement, the movement itself shows little concern for fostering solidarity among its participants beyond the annual conference 'get-togethers'.[144] While the movement strongly advocates rhetoric around collective action and mobilisation at a local level, I found no strategies in place that strengthen solidarity ties among its attendees or facilitate real-world *local* impact projects for collective participation that bring women together around local issues. My online search for 'events' hosted by the Colour Sisterhood in South Africa delivered only five listed events since 2016: a Christmas show, three church-based 'inspirational' talks with Christian 'guest speakers', and the Colour Conference itself.[145] [146]Braidotti (2014), as recalled from the introduction to this thesis, states that the transformative gesture "is never the individual solitary gesture'—but rather "a collective activity".

Returning to Hassim's (2004) three points for the facilitation of transformation through and within a social movement (whether 'feminine' or 'feminist'), the Colour Sisterhood seems to fall short of even the most elemental aspects: the articulation of interests of its members (by denying difference and local contexts), mobilisation of its members in defence of (local, practical and political) interests, and developing strategies to achieve these aims. As seen through the list of 500 projects, its 'alliances',

[144] The website suggests that 'group projects' are in place for activation. However, a closer look reveals that these, again, only encourage individuals to create their own forms of 'group action'.
[145] Sisterhood South Africa. N.d. Upcoming Events. [O]. Available. https://www.facebook.com/pg/SisterhoodSouthAfrica/events/?ref=page_internal [2018, May]
[146] In 2019 I discovered smaller 'Sisterhood events' that take place in South Africa in Hillsong Church contexts. Perhaps we may expect more sites for fostering 'ground level' group activation in the future.

as most other aspects, are kept "close to home"—'home' here not being local contexts but rather the ever-present 'Centre' (the movement as dominant institution). In the next chapter, the question of whether alliance with the broader movement of 'feminism' is promoted is examined. While feminine mobilisation is at times seemingly 'spectacularly' articulated by the movement these failures suggest that, rather than representing a commitment to female-driven empowerment and change, this articulation and its 'ritualisation' as well as representation are first and foremost used as legitimating agents for the Colour Sisterhood project. As argued of Hillsong by Wade, the movement reproduces "the unalterable mechanisms of the economic order in a way that imbues them with greater meaning" as part of its strategy of enchantment (2016: 661).

Chapter 4:

Feminism and the Colour Sisterhood

Introduction

> Down through time and history...one of the most relentless attacks against humanity has been in an unreasonable oppression and distortion of value of women... Society calls it "misogyny", the hatred of women—and sadly, it is alive and flourishing, even in many so-called modern and sophisticated societies...What we were heading toward was a full-scale response to all that had historically assailed the value and worth of women (Houston 2016: 35-36).
>
> Women are not beneath, behind, or secondary...we are not responsible for the demise of humanity (Houston 2016: 248-249).

The Colour Sisterhood has been interpreted by some as a feminist movement, while others have been sceptical, or spoken out against Hillsong's 'anti-feminist agendas'.[147] Where the movement, or its parent, Hillsong Church, has been associated with feminism, response has been both positive and negative. In 'The Sisterhood: Hillsong in a Feminine Key', Tanya Riches launches off a definitional approach of the notion of 'empowerment' to defend Hillsong as promoting women's choice with regards to "career, bodily integrity, educational attainment, and also facilitating their economic, political, and cultural participation" (Riches 2017: 85-87).[148] While, here, she refrains from calling the movement 'feminist', she writes in 'S&M: Can You Be an Intelligent Feminist and Attend...Hillsong Church?', that "if you see me with a newly released Colour Your World Conference #2 T-shirt that screams "GET YOUR BRAVE ON", then just know I wear it as a feminist".[149] In Riches' texts, as well as elsewhere where the connection between feminism and Hillsong is seen in a positive light, there seems to be a cautionary rather than fully fledged association, whereas those institutions who wish, on the other hand, to critique or attack the church elicit the link more readily in both feminist and anti-feminist 'accusations'. The prior is most visible in fundamentalist religious blogs whereas the

[147] Recently, the internet has latched onto celebrities Justin Bieber's, Selena Gomez's, as well as Kourtney Kardashian's attendance of Hillsong church, creating another wave of interest into the workings and values of Hillsong, especially their stance on LGBTQ rights and 'feminist issues' such as abortion. See as an example: Toofab. 2018. Inside Justin Bieber's Church: Hillsong's Culture of Homophobia and Anti-Feminism [O]. Available: http://toofab.com/2018/06/18/justin-bieber-hillsong-carl-lentz-selena-gomez-kardashian-kourtney-hailey-baldwin-homophobia-sexism-sexist-anti-feminism-feminist-chris-pratt-religion-christianity/ [2018, July]

[148] In her online biography Riches is described as "one of the world's most respected scholars regarding the phenomenon of Hillsong Church". Her work on this topic is mostly either favourable or apologetic of the movements' practices. See Riches, T. s.a. Tanya Riches. [O]. Available: https://www.tanyariches.org/research [2018, July]

[149] Riches, T. 2014. S&M: Can You Be an Intelligent Feminist and Attend...Hillsong Church? [O]. Available: http://thebigsmoke.com.au/2014/03/14/intelligence-feminist-hillsong/ [2018, July]

latter rings out through online feminist voices. [150] Scholars such as Marion Maddox and Elizabeth Miller have written on how women's submission remains a theology that continues to dominate the church, even amid the spiel of women's empowerment.

From the outset it at least seems that the Colour Sisterhood wishes to distance itself from the term 'feminism'. Maddox noted an 'outspokenness' against feminism by Houston in the past, recalling her words from the 2006 Colour Conference where she stated that they would be "doing something wrong" if they "began to look even remotely feminist", and again in 2007 where she asked women to build a sisterhood notwithstanding the fact that the term also serves 'feminist goals' (Maddox 2013a: 17). In 2008, Houston writes in *I'll Have What She's Having: The Ultimate Compliment for any Woman Daring To Change Her World* that "being a woman of strong conviction has nothing to do with misguided feminism", and that 'misguided feminism' means that women sometimes try to be men "when God created them women" (2008: 111). However, she quotes evangelical feminist Christine Cain in saying that "Feminism in its purest origin is the emancipation of wrongly imprisoned women" (Houston 2008: 111).

The relationship between feminism and religion has been of a tumultuous nature. Christianity, given its patriarchal traditions and male sovereign God-language, and the abuse thereof in justifying systems of oppression has, for many, read like the antithesis of female liberation (Van Leeuwen *et al.* 1993: 117, 136-137). It is no wonder that feminist theologians like Mary Daly remind us (with a 'holy anger') how patriarchal religions, particularly Christianity, have historically been (and sadly often presently remain) in the business of "crushing women and corrupting men" (Daly 1973: 167).[151] Nonetheless, others feel that a non-patriarchal reading of the Bible supports the liberation of women (Van Leeuwen *et al.* 1993, hooks 2000) as well as the sexual minorities of the LGBTQ community (West *et al*. 2016). With the post-secular turn in feminism, Braidotti states from a secular point of view that "belief systems and their rituals are perhaps not incompatible with critical thought and practices of citizenship" (2013:35).

Van Leewen *et al* believe that feminist theology must aim to "reconstruct the Christian tradition, Scripture included, to expose its patriarchal bias and emphasise its liberating possibilities", treating

[150] See as a comparative example of negative assessments of Hillsong from anti-feminist and feminist stances: The End Time. 2012. How The Christian Secret Feminists Are Reforming The Definition of Biblical Womanhood. Part 1. [O]. Available: http://the-end-time.blogspot.com/2012/10/how-christian-secret-feminists-are.html [2018, July] and Hellonhairylegs. 2008. Hillsong and the Shine Programme. [O]. Available: https://hellonhairylegs.wordpress.com/2008/07/26/hillsong-and-the-shine-programme/ [2018, July]

[151] In *Beyond God the Father* Daly calls for the destruction of and exorcising from the conscious the 'idols of male superiority' (1973: 29)—or phallic Christian ideology and its fruit namely self-guilt and self-blame as the salvific moment for women, and in fact, all humans (1973: 44-55).

theology and the Bible with a "rule of sobriety" (1993: 136-137). Rosemary Radford Ruether writes that feminist hermeneutics must begin with a "shift in consciousness that questions the inerrancy of the Bible and classical Christian traditions based on it" (Ruether s.a.: 587). That which "denies or diminishes or distorts the full humanity of women" should be seen as unreflective of the nature of the divine (*ibid*.). Gerald West, Kapya Kaoma, and Charlene van der Walk state that an important issue within the feminist -religious debate is how the "historically inherited" heteropatriarchal Christian theology is interrogated (West *et al.* 2016: 1). They state, "sexuality has become the new site of struggle and the 'old' theology does not fit" (*ibid.*).[152]

Hillsong has come and remains under public scrutiny for their traditionalist stance barring gay marriage. In past years, some were optimistic that this may change, given a sermon in 2013 where Brian Houston placed the "gay situation" in context of how the world is changing, as well as his assertion that "it is an ongoing conversation" and "we're on a journey with it".[153] However, as in these statements, homosexuality appears to be a topic mostly treated in evasive terms, "not often mentioned from Hillsong's pulpits; for or against", as Anthony Venn-Brown, author of *A Life of Unlearning –A Preacher's Struggle with His Homosexuality* (2004), states.[154] [155]

While the Colour Sisterhood desires camaraderie with certain 'popular trends', it similarly avoids overtly 'controversial' issues, carefully navigating its place (non-place) between its Christian ethos and the 'world' it wants to both emanate and evangelise.[156] This chapter, while pointing to this silence, regrettably does not explore the full implications of this silence (although this certainly is a valuable topic for another study) within the movement. Instead, following from Hassim's argument that a distinct 'feminist' orientation needs to be present in the activities of non-politically orientated movements, I look at the elements that *do* present themselves in context of the movement and the 2017 conference. This means that analysis largely falls within the very limited standard of the rights of cisgender, heterosexual women.

[152] Within this context, they, for example, call for the granting of an "epistemological privilege to the lived reality of LGBTQ Christians" (West *et al.* 2016: 2).
[153] Paulson, M. 2014. Mega-church Pastor Signals Shift in Tone on Gay Marriage. [O]. Available: https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/18/us/mega-church-pastor-signals-shift-in-tone-on-gay-marriage.html [2018, September]
[154] Venn-Brown, A. 2013. Hillsong: Pastor Brian Houston Talks About The Pink (Gay) Elephant in the Room. [O]. Available: https://www.abbi.org.au/2013/08/hillsong-homosexuality/ [2018, October]
[155] Interestingly, the Colour Conference 2014 invitation lists a 'workshop' entitled: "Sexuality in a modern world! Liberating sexuality for the young woman, hetero-homo-bi-sexuality: what's normal in today's society" (Colour Your World Women's Conference 1999).
[156] Lee and Sinitiere believe that part of the success of mega-churches can be attributed to the fact that they "avoid (yet subtly address)" hot-button political issues like abortion or gay marriage (2009: 7-8).

I also feel the need to highlight that, within the secular climate of 'post-feminist' culture, the new "feminine 'public sphere'" is characterized by a "highly conservative mode of feminine empowerment" which again, imposes limits on women (McRobbie 2009: 27). Post-feminist 'devices' include a language of hyper-individuality, hyper-consumerism, personal choice and responsibility to excel, a nostalgia for the 'femininity of the past, and emphasis on beauty, make-over and exercise regimes, and 'white-ness' (McRobbie 2009). Gill argues that postfeminism perseveres in recent times writing that "aside from the relentless championing of heterosexuality, fashion-love, and consumerism that pervades 'hot feminism', this rebranded version [of postfeminism]—which shares so much of its content with the women's magazine culture from which it is developed—is notable for both its affect policing (resolutely not angry)…and its contentlessness" (2015: 618).The Colour Sisterhood may therefore reflect the ambiguous anxieties around women's status, as Maddox describes, from both the religious and secular sector (2013a: 25).

In this chapter, I continue to look at the movement's discourse on women's empowerment, focusing on how this reads into a feminist understanding of the term. The first section explores how the notion of gender 'complementarity' informs the Colour Sisterhood's construction of femininity and subtly underlies its rhetoric on 'women's leadership'. The next section looks at examples of how gender dichotomies (necessitated by women's complementary status), especially the 'beauty myth', plays out within the movement. The final section argues that the movement posits itself as 'above' the need for feminist politics.

4.1 Women in Leadership—or are they? John Gray's Complementarianist Gospel

'Women in Leadership' is a concept that resounds loudly throughout the discourse of the Colour Sisterhood. At first a reading of Houston's various texts appears to advocate leadership and liberation boldly and unconditionally. Reading the Christian icon of the woman of Proverbs 31 in terms of 'leadership', Houston writes: "she leads by example in marriage, ministry, and motherhood. She is an entrepreneurial leader, innovative in spirit and style. She is a smart and savvy businesswoman" (Houston 2016: 101). Houston states later on that: "There will be many an occasion in the days ahead when the girls will be front and centre of His church and at the forefront of His purposes, helping to lead the charge and achieve all that is needed in the is world" (2016: 249), and that "there still remain pockets of humanity who have waited centuries for someone to come with a message of freedom and liberation to all that is feminine. To observe any compromise on this message is something that will always cause me concern" (Houston 2016: 91). Often, women are

offered guidance in terms of this 'leadership'—they are expected to excel at it, and take up the "responsibility of influence of others'.[157]

Regrettably, a closer look at the messages concerning women's 'empowerment' yields that there is, however, always a compromise—the 'condition' that 'women's leadership' does not fall outside of 'men's headship', and that femininity remain within a prescribed, 'divine' "blue print for womanhood" (Houston 2016: 6). Maddox (2013a) and Miller (2016) find a fascinating contradiction in the manner female church leadership is championed against a backdrop of re-domestication and 'wifely submission' within the movement. Maddox writes that "Hillsong emphasises gender complementarity, with men's and women's roles sharply differentiated according to standard gender stereotypes" (2013a: 14). This is, however, reflective of a stubborn ideology within the broader Pentecostal movement. As Rosihah Mmannana Gabaitse writes of Pentecostalism in Africa, women are seemingly offered 'permission' to speak (in itself a problematic assertion) but continue to be subjugated through "boundaries of exclusion along with gender lines" (2015: 2).

At times this 'compromise' exposes itself only subtly, while at others it is imprinted on the Sisterhood loudly and clearly (as we shall see in the upcoming section). Maddox recalls how, during the 2008 Sydney Colour Conference emphasis was placed on men having to 'release' their women (to their "pre-marriage" roles) for ministry (2013a: 15-16). A similar message by Brian Houston was displayed on-screen during the 2017 conference. He talks about women "contributing" to church activities, saying that "there's a place for women in every part of church life, and if a woman is more capable than a man in a specific situation, I think it is sad to not see them 'released' into all that God has for them" (Houston in *It's a Girl- Value Unearthed* 2017: 23:01). His wife affirms that "we need great men who recognise and unearth the potential [of women]" (Houston in *It's a Girl-Value Unearthed* 2017: 38:25).[158] [159]

Maddox argues that women's 'empowerment' within the movement is still largely defined in terms of 'desired male other'—where a physical 'he' is lacking, women are encouraged to direct their

[157] See Joy. 2007. *Bobbie Houston: My Story*. [O]. Available: http://www.joymag.co.za/article.php?id=76 [2018, August]

[158] In the same production, Bobbie Houston states that she is grateful for a husband "who was releasing women even before he knew he was releasing women" (Houston in It's a Girl: Value Unearthed 2017: 23:01).

[159] Miller writes on the message of the Colour Conference 2013 that, while women are encouraged to chase empowerment through education, career and self-worth, these only come secondary to their pre-defined (submissive) role in family and church (2016). She highlights that Houston's statement in her 2008 book *I'll Have What She's Having: The Ultimate Compliment for any Woman Daring To Change Her World* --that "single, married, divorced, or widowed is not a status that affects our destiny" is undermined by her continuing to say that she knows "literally dozens of women who are single, active, and achieving so much in life" (Houston in Miller 2016:67).

desire to God (2013a).[160] [161] Continually within the Colour Sisterhood movement, women's identity seems to be suspended from the batten of male approval. In *The Sisterhood*, Houston relates a video skit she aired at "Conference" where three men, including her son Joel, against the backdrop of Bono's (singer Paul Hewson's) song 'Grace', apologised on behalf of men who have inflicted pain, affirmed the value of women and recalled how one women testified that "the men in the creative presentation affirmed her value as a woman after her personal value as a woman had been deeply damaged by the most important man in her world" (2016: 66-67). An example were the opening skits on the days of the 2017 Colour Conference Cape Town where young single women, and later women who were 'mothers', were called up to the stage to 'dance' and 'catwalk model' for the 'approval' of (and if you were single, perhaps a 'date or slow dance with' one of) a group of young men dressed in sailor outfits.[162]

Perhaps the most vivid sketch, however, of how the movement defines 'woman' in terms of complementarianism during the 2017 Cape Town Colour Conference, was the theatrical and stereotype-ridden performances by John Gray. Gray was a main speaker at the event, along with Houston and Lucinda Dooley. During the first of two lengthy performances he dramatically proclaimed that:

> The power of a woman is not that she's a different species, [but that] she is the 'rest' of a man, she's a *wombed* man—the power of a woman is the power of multiplication of what men gives in concentrated form...if I give my wife groceries she makes it dinner...if I buy my wife a house she starts putting up paintings and putting up flowers, and vases...and perfumes and scents, and all of this stuff all over the house and she turns a box into a home. I gave her a seed, she gave me a son. Women have the power to multiply what men gives in concentrated form ...it's the power of women because you have so much beauty, so much texture, you add balance, you add colour... God knew what he was doing when he created women...because you guys feel the things that men don't (11:00) (Gray 2017ab: 08:45, 09:20, 11:00).[163]

[160] In the 2017 'Colour documentary', Houston concludes her statement on men unearthing women's potential (mentioned above) by stating "I am not suggesting for one minute that it takes a man to find you—we have an ultimate 'he' in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ" ((Houston in It's a Girl: Value Unearthed 2017: 38:50)

[161] Van Leeuwen *et al.* write that "being married" is within many Christian circles a "status marker", notwithstanding the "honour of singleness" celebrated in the Scriptures (1993: 498).

[162] Heteronormativity is reinforced through these gender-role stereotyping practices.

[163] Gray's referring to 'Woman' as 'wombed-man' speaks of how patriarchy's success has been relational to "institutionalised biological motherhood" (Tong 2009: 86). The restricting view that 'if you are not a mother, you are not really a women' (and the often accompanying notion that 'mothering' is therefore a women's only

Reiterating women's position as fulfilling men's 'desires' and God's bestowment of 'favour' on man, Gray proclaimed: "You are an answer to a prayer a man couldn't even muster to pray...you're the favour factor (Gray 2017ab 7:53).

As seen here, Gray was unapologetically animated about women's pre-destined, 'divinely-ordained' roles as 'complementing' man's 'higher' pre-ordained role. He ends a particularly impassioned skit on women's emotions with the statement: "That's why God made you the help-meet...we have a big vision but you know how to put feet to the vision. We [men] have the wings, but you put the breath to the wings" (Gray 2017ab: 12:55). Throughout Gray's performances, the audience members were laughing, applauding and cheering, seemingly completely at ease with the concept of their complementary status and their position as an 'add-on' to huMANity.

In the excerpt from Gray's message above, we see Gray allocating to women the 'power' of reproduction and nurturance, the 'power' over the domestic realm, and the 'power' to physically and ornamentally enhance the lives of man. It is striking how Gray, in almost every part of his message(s), eagerly elicits the domestic as part of his 'descriptions' of femininity. Women's functions in the domestic environment and the traditional notion that women have a 'natural' or 'innate' talent for homemaking (Van Leeuwen *et al.* 1993: 509-511) underscores almost everything Gray has to say about the 'value of women'. Domestic work, mothering, and nurturing are romanticised in terms of 'divine calling'.

Gray then quickly proceeds to negate this 'power' (that never was) by rendering 'woman' as being in a perpetual 'hyper-emotional' state, one where her emotionality is portrayed as bordering on hysteria or mental insanity. He states: "The problem with y'all is that you're all emotional so even when you try to hide it, you can't...the enemy attacks you on your emotions [he shakes his head pitifully, sighs and grunts]…y'all so emotional [rolls his eyes], y'all cry at movies, you have season each month that tears just flow—I'm married so I know" (Gray 2017a: 11:25). He continues on to re-enact his wife apparently crying hysterically, and when prompted by 'himself' on the problem, struggles to articulate the word 'butterfly', while pointing shaking to an unseen object beyond the stage. Appearing as 'himself' again, he 'backs away' from 'her' wide-eyed with an apparently shocked "okay honey" (Gray 2017a).

Hierarchical gender complementarity means that roles become defined in terms of assigned dichotomising, stereotyped gender traits. Traditionally 'Woman' came to be represented as "irrational, oversensitive [and] destined to be a wife and mother" (Braidotti 1994a: 235). Daly writes

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'job') helps confine 'woman' to the realm of the domestic, negates their autonomy and denies women their "right to have and to fulfil their own wants and needs" (*ibid.*). It is also highly exclusionary to 'non-mothers'.

that male identity as "human caricature" rests on the "eternal masculine stereotype, which implies hyper-rationality...'objectivity', aggressivity, and the possession of dominating and manipulative attitudes" (Daly 1973: 15), while the 'caricature of the 'Other''—the "eternal feminine", is defined in terms of "hyper-emotionalism, passivity [and] self-abnegation" (*ibid*.). As highlighted by Braidotti, Beauvoir argues that the exclusion of women from "crucial areas of civic life" (the university, church, organized politics etc.) is "necessary to uphold the prestige of the 'one' of the male sex as the sole possessor of [rational] subjectivity"—women as 'other' are therefore confined to "compulsory irrationality, unreasonableness, immanence, and passivity" (Braidotti 1994a: 236). However, as we have seen in previous chapters, and here in the words of Soothill on Pentecostal practice--women's apparent 'natural' emotionality is construed as a spiritual 'intuitiveness' (2007: 111). The negation of women's power is substituted with a notion of 'women's special spiritual power'.

Gray, in his second performance, describes women's biological functions as being in service of 'other's' (i.e. man's) ambitions. In Braidotti's words, "women are "expected to nurture and uphold the male ego and desires; her ego is not an issue" (Braidotti 1994a: 235). While singing women's praises for their 'self-sacrificial nature', Gray says: "That's the gift of a woman, she will birth something else while she puts her dreams on hold" (Gray 2017a: 23:18). Talking about his wife's menstruation cycles he states that she says of the pain that "it is just part of what I have to endure in order to make sure that you have a legacy" (Gray 2017a: 25:08).

In an even more spirited rendering during his second performance, Gray uses gender to excuse men who 'fail to meet women's and the family's 'needs'. Directing his question at the 'married women in the audience', he says:

> Please don't get mad at your husband because he can't always meet your needs, because you make it look so easy...you're so amazing, that you make what is supernatural look normal...that's the power of a woman. You're so amazing that he thinks that dinner just magically appears, that clothes magically get sown, that the kids' hair gets magically done. He doesn't realize what it takes for you to be a Proverbs 31 woman, and walk around here and be interceding while some of your needs are not being met, while you still sow, while people don't see your own pain. He doesn't understand, because he was not created to be a woman. That's why God made you, to complete him...and you do all of it with your hair done, how do you just keep your hair done? (Gray 2017a: 11:45-19:07).

As seen, Gray's interpretation of 'female nurturance', associating women with a 'natural' 'ethics of care' promotes "the view that because women can and have cared, they should always care, no

matter the cost to themselves" (Tong 2009: 174). In these renderings women are expected to 'lay down the self' and at the same time 'forgive men' their inadequacies. Sandra Lee Bartky acknowledges that wives may feel empowered through the experience of caring for their husbands; however, she warns that while so called 'feeling empowered' is one thing, the reality may actually be the opposite, and harmful to women (Tong 2009: 175). Assertions like these dangerously suggest women stay in situations that are harmful or detrimental to them (Soothill 2007: 7). Stating that a philosophy of submission plays out in domestic violence (2013a: 21), Maddox recalls several occasions during 2008 Colour Conference where, rather than being told to 'leave' "violent or dangerous marriages" (Maddox 2013a: 14), women were encouraged to instead "step down" and "leave a space for God to work" (Houston in Maddox 2013a: 15). In a gentler but emotional rendering of a similar message, Houston states at the 2017 Cape Town conference of men who fail to be women's 'protectors' that "Christ needs to get in them, alright!", and tells women to get on their knees and discover that "God is your mighty protector" (Houston 2017: 31:33).

In a study of a South African (born and bred) Pentecostal evangelical women's conference, the Worthy Women's Conference, Sarojini Nadar and Cheryl Potgieter coin the term *Formenism* to describe the phenomenon where a discourse of men's inherent supremacy is propagated and adhered to voluntarily by Pentecostal Christian *women* (2010: 141). *Formenism* believes in "[women's] liberation through submission [to men]" (Nadar & Potgieter: 150). Drawing from a study done in Pheonix, Durban, by Isabel Phiri, Nadar and Potgieter describe how this ideology has resulted in wide-spread domestic violence against women at the hands of their spouses, often leaders in church (2010: 151). Quoting Anne Barrowdale, they believe that "if submission continues to be the 'theory', then abuse will inevitably continue to be the 'practice' (Barrowdale in Nadar & Potgieter 2010: 151).

It is likely that most women attending the Colour Conferences, however, are indeed 'blind' to the patriarchal clout under which they are called to lead/serve, and the "life-denying" (Soothill 2007) effects it may have on themselves and other women. Kate Millet argued long ago that women are "conditioned" to passively accept control (1969: 307). As Maddox (2013a) and Miller (2016) note, Pentecostalism has traditionally endorsed male superiority to different degrees while "generally downplaying its real-world effects" (Maddox 2013a: 10) and concealing "gendered constraints in language of freedom and choice" (Miller 2016: 66). Miller argues that by its continual emphasis on gender complementarity, Pentecostalism has created an environment where women come to believe that their experience ought to differ to that of men—and they therefore unquestioningly act according to the 'femininity' prescribed by the church (Miller 2016: 61-62). Lewis describes via

Jessica Ogden how women, when faced with having to emulate a notion of 'proper woman' (2008: 7-8), will actively "generate the means and meanings" in order to obtain this 'respectability'. She states that, when women are given "few choices of identification and belonging…they will zealously demonstrate prescribed gender behaviour" (*ibid.*). In the next section, I look at how this 'prescribed' femininity is largely defined in terms of appearance and beauty, shrouding women's loss of power in a glow of the 'spectacularly feminine'.

4.2 Gender Dichotomising and the 'Beauty Myth': The Shine Programme and Esther Houston's Fashion Blog

In the visual material of the Colour Sisterhood, women reign (over 'other' victim women) in a joyful (male-less) utopia.[164] Even the presence of male God, as seen in Chapter 2, comes to be represented through 'feminine' symbols—roses and flowers, a soft wind through white curtains, a gentle 'whisper'. The Colour Sisterhood offers a mythical 'physical', virtual and subjective 'world' where women are seemingly not subjected to, or in competition with male dominance. Women's status therefore as possibly being 'secondary or fundamentally 'different' to man's' seems happily temporarily evaded, but not forgotten.

In the 'divine design', as we have seen in earlier chapters, 'womanhood' is also imagined as mythically 'beautiful', transcendental, hyper-feminine and purified, manifesting through an elitist rhetoric of 'flourishing'. Maddox (2013a) writes that one of the most prominent ways the Sisterhood are reminded of their complementarity is through the relentless focus on conventional representations and practices of beauty. With an almost 'religious' tenor, 'practices of beauty', according to Wolf, is a means of keeping women, especially when in positions that raise them to power (2002: 7) (or simply allow them to feel "worth more") enslaved by the message that they are essentially "worth less" (2002:18). Women are construed as being naturally trapped within the "Feminine Mystique"—however, "virtuous beauty" has come to replace "virtuous domesticity" (Wolf 2002:18).

McRobbie writes that "the fashion-beauty complex functions on behalf of patriarchal authority so as to ensure the stability of the heterosexual matrix, especially when it is threatened by social changes brought about by women coming forward into the world of work and employment" (2009: 71). Because, in modern times (and in keeping with contemporary trends, in the Colour Sisterhood) gender complementarity can certainly no longer rely on representations of women as homemakers

[164] As discussed in Chapter 2, the movement's imagery continues to place upon its representations of 'Sisterhood women' symbols denoting royalty or 'transcendence' such as crowns, wings, and splashes of gold leaf.

alone, the 'beauty backlash' has found a way to say to even successful working women, that their bodies, their faces—'they' are not enough (Wolf 2002 7-19).[165] In the movement, representations of ideally beautiful and perfect hyper-femininity is employed to separate the 'feminine'—as different (and secondary to) 'the masculine'.

One of the most cited phenomena in articles criticising Hillsong for negating women's worth is their Shine programme for girls (and, as discussed later on, its contrast to the Strength programme for boys) between 12 and 18.[166] Appearing as one of the 'partnered NGO's" at the 2017 Colour Conference, and being present there as a range of volunteers performing manicures in the conference's 'outer sanctuary' lobby, the Shine programme essentially hopes to teach young girls their 'value' in sessions centred around self-adornment and self-regulation. Introducing the movement, Sunshine Wrethman states in a short introductory 'film' that the programme, consisting of a group of 'volunteers' visiting schools once a week for an hour, is focused around the theme of 'strength, worth and purpose'. However, the accompanying footage shows a room full of girls titivating with make-up and nail products while 'volunteers' style their hair. Wrethman continues that: "We bring in make-up artists and hair dressers...the purpose of the practical sessions is really to give the girls a sense of self worth, confidence, to encourage them to represent themselves to the world in the best way they can...What we really need is volunteers from the beauty industry—hair, make-up, nails".[167] According to The Sydney Morning Herald, Sui-Linn White, the president of the Hills Teachers Association (2008), stated that teachers had complained throughout the years, stating that: "The focus on skin care, nail care, hair care", "make-up" and "etiquette and deportment lessons", "are things women fought against for centuries—they have no place in a public school".[168]

As Rosalind Gill writes "monitoring and surveilling the self have long been requirements of the performance of successful femininity—with instruction in grooming, attire, posture, elocution and

[165] As seen through Gray, the 'domestic' does continue to function as major signifier for 'femininity' within the movement. A subtler example is how the 'Colour gifts' distributed to every conference attendee have mainly been items traditionally associated with women as home-makers such as rubber washing-up gloves, teapots, knitting needles (Houston 2016 : 97, 205) and gardening gloves (Colour Conference gift 2017).

[166] See, for example, hellonhairylegs. 2008. Hillsong and the Shine Programme. [O]. Available: https://hellonhairylegs.wordpress.com/2008/07/26/hillsong-and-the-shine-programme/ [2018, August], Ealing, L. & Cameron, T. 2008. Hillsong's Miracle Make-Up Cure. [O]. Available: https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/hillsongs-miracle-make-cure [2018, August] and Ravingpente. 2008. Shine-Hillsong's Latest School Outreach to Young Women. [O]. Available: https://signposts02.wordpress.com/2008/07/26/shine-hillsongs-latest-school-outreach-to-young-women/ [2018, August]

[167] Wrethman, S, Hillsong Shine Programme Facilitator. 2014. *Hillsong Shine Programme*. Interview accessed via Youtube. [O]. Available https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MeqEXAvzwes [Transcript]. Rawmeeja. [2018, August]

[168] Bibby, P. 2008. Hillsong Hits Schools with Beauty Gospel. [O]. Available: https://www.smh.com.au/national/hillsong-hits-schools-with-beauty-gospel-20080726-gdsnrx.html [2018, August]

'manners' being 'offered' to women to allow them to more closely emulate the upper-class white ideal" (Gill 2007: 155). While these 'self-improvement' guides for women have become synonymous with glossy women's magazines (Gill 2007, McRobbie 2009, Wolf 2007), they are found here as part of a religious agenda. To be "spectacularly feminine" (McRobbie 2009: 60), as we have seen before, is an important part of the Colour Sisterhood's 'flourish philosophy'. This is not only true of the movement's visual marketing elements, but of the Colour Sisterhood, and Hillsong culture in general.

Beauty (of a Western standard), is a much celebrated marker for the 'feminine' throughout the movement's discourse, Houston often referring to appearance within her book *The Sisterhood* and on-stage conference performances. Beauty regimes and self adornment are celebrated, such as in the first version of the 2018 Colour Conference invitation (distributed in printed form during the 2017 conference, but later revised) which was conceptualized along the line of a 'fashion shoot', texted with a font and kerning reminiscent of that of Vogue magazine's title font. One woman, in what seems to be intended as an almost 'comical' rendering, is shown using an eyelash curler and a very bright red lipstick. From her public account, Bobbie Houston cross-Instagrams images from son Joel's (Hillsong N.Y.C. pastor) model wife, Esther Houston's fashion range, Marthagraeff, and Hillsong church's webpage links up to Esther Houston's fashion-orientated blog called Misswhoo (Hillsong 2016: /contributor/esther-houston/). Hillsong states that the blog is meant to "empower, equip, educate and entertain its readers" (*ibid.*).

Throughout Esther Houston's blog, Esther Houston is the subject of alluring fashion photographs imitating those trends found within the familiar world of high-end glossy women's fashion magazines. Tall, desperately thin and mostly blonde, she features in provocative, glamorous images wearing high-fashion labels, swimwear, and fantasy and fetish items (captain's hats, mickey mouse 'ears' and wigs).[169] The blog, with its 'leggy' shots of Esther Houston, almost always accompanied with references to God, suggests to the world, as Miller writes of Bobbie Houston, that Pentecostal women are anything but "drab, colourless, and lacklustre" (Miller 2016: 66).

As an example, one image (fig 9) shows Esther Houston in an urban night time scene, posed leaning against a vintage Ford, her long legs exposed all the way in animal print swimwear bottoms 'dressed-up' with a crocheted black off-the-shoulder pelerine and black, studded stilettos. Looking down and leaning with one perfectly manicured hand on the bonnet, her long high-lighted hair blows dishevelled about her shoulders, partly shrouding her face. In her other hand she rests a discarded

[169] Within fashion images, the "absent signifier of phallocentric power" is substituted with "fetishistic fashion items and objects" (McRobbie 2009: 101).

party or fetish mask against her exposed thigh. Taken in an abandoned parking lot or alley, the scene is dark and moody, enhanced with warm filters to allow for a retro 'night life' scene. Houston seems to have recently exited a party or club (or otherwise, something one may more daringly associate with the fetish mask she now no longer needs). As part of a series of images under the blog title 'The Right to Create' Houston writes of the images that "I love expressing, thinking outside the box. Our ability to create is a gift from God" and later on "God chose to give us the right to worship him with our art".[170] A far cry from a religiously pious and conservative femininity based on 'restraint' that may be traditionally expected from a 'pastor's wife', Houston's erotically charged portraits promises a life where one may be at once 'sanctified' while enjoying secular pleasures such as the post-feminist-sanctioned sexual expression and adventure, the 'high' life, partying, 'flirtation' with the male gaze, fashion and spending (McRobbie 2009).[171] [172]

[170] Houston, E. 2015. The Right To Create. [O]. Available: http://www.misswhoo.com/?tag=fashion [2018, August]

[171] Esther Houston answers to criticism for being "too sexy" and 'sharing a confusing message' by stating on a Hillsong published 'blog post' that "I have been set free". She writes that she can be 'used' by God (to make a difference) "high heels and all", and attacks the 'critics' for being 'petty' and projecting their own insecurities onto someone else (Hillsong: /collected/blog/2015/07/it-is-for-freedom-that-we-have-been-set-free/#.W3QtKc4zaUk).

[172] Maddox notes how early Pentecostal generations followed a theology of "spiritual beauty" that discouraged women from pursuing an 'outward beauty' through make-up and fashion (2013: 4). In contrast, according to Maddox, Hillsong women are now expected to "hone their looks into a commercially-sanctioned ideal of feminine beauty" (2013: 5).

Figure 9: Houston, E. The Right To Create Image 7. 2015.

(Esther Houston: http://www.misswhoo.com/home/2015/10/18/hos8mzhxn90jl0wx1qv7axomfny4ea)

Rosalind Gill describes how "an obsession and preoccupation with the [female] body" has marked (post-feminist) media culture"—"femininity is defined as a bodily property rather than (say) a social structural or psychological one" (Gill 2007: 149). As McRobbie (2009) aptly points out, the sad reality is that tied up to the bodily anxieties that may be generated by the "high value which society places on spectacularly coded style of feminine beauty...at the expense of other capacities" (McRobbie 2009: 118) are female mental health issues, self-harming practices, addictions and anorexia. As

Naomi Wolf puts it, the words "all else being equal" is left out of "the myth of entrepreneurial beauty", of woman against nature", and this is inevitably harmful for women (2002: 29). Wolf feels that "the beauty myth" is "more insidious than any mystique of femininity yet" (2002: 19).

McRobbie describes how the 'fashion-beauty complex', as well as the 'make-over paradigm', functions as 'luminosities' (via Deleuze)—a pre-defined set of 'rules' for, or "required rituals" of, femininity that inevitably allow women to 'exist' only as a 'sparkle' or 'shimmer' (McRobbie 2009: 60-61). She writes of these luminosities that "the Symbolic, faced with possible disruption to the stable boundaries of sexual difference, and to the threat posed therein to patriarchal authority" creates a new regulatory power, i.e. self-adherence to 'spectacular femininity' (McRobbie 2009: 61-63) and 'glamorous individuality' (McRobbie 2009: 125). Within this "cloud of light", women are expected to adhere to a set of prescribed standards—in order to attain them, they need to be in a constant state of self-monitoring and become "harsh judges of themselves" (McRobbie 2009: 60) in the processes of trying to 'self-produce' as a coherent subject (McRobbie 2009: 101). As described by Butler, the images of 'perfect femininity' coincide with "animosity, antagonism and loathing to unfeminine, masculine women, feminists and lesbians together" (McRobbie 2009: 119).[173]

The fashion photograph is one way of offering women a fantasy of a "whole, perfect self" (Rabine 1994: 65). Van Leeuwen *et al.* state that "women learn the contours of privileged femininity by absorbing the ideals of white Western culture, including ideals about how women should dress" (1993: 301). Those who lack the means (such as poorer classes) to go about this constant regime of self-improvement, are still pressed upon by consumer culture to spend on and pamper themselves, or risk becoming 'invisible' (McRobbie 2009: 128-134). McRobbie describes the role played by the glossy magazine genre 'fashion image' in perpetuating feminine psychopathology (McRobbie 2009: 96), stating that these images "keep young women locked into a hermetic world of feminine ambivalence and distress" (McRobbie 2009: 111)—"you have to be rich, healthy, thin and forever young" (Braidotti 2015: 27). Wolf writes that the 'beauty myth' subjects women to a "secret "underlife" poisoning their freedom...it is a dark vein of self hatred, physical obsessions, terror of aging, and dread of lost control" (2002: 10).

Houston very briefly addresses this point in a section she opens with "God is Beautiful, and so are you!" saying, "Image distortion is sadly no longer the exclusive domain of teenagers and young

[173] Women are only 'seen' when they adhere to these 'technologies of the self'—yet the process is insatiable and the 'self' unattainable. Because women's bodies are defined as 'signifying lack', the constant failed project of producing the self as a 'whole' means that women themselves come to see themselves as founded on 'lack' (McRobbie 2009: 101). Women are therefore acknowledged for the never-ceasing effort put into attaining this 'self', offered 'power' in the form of "momentary visibility or short-lived celebrity" (McRobbie 2009: 125).

women. Reports tell of an alarming number of small children being treated for eating disorders and related diseases" (2016: 82). Paradoxically, she makes this statement in context of defending the 'make-up mirrors' that were gifted to women during one year's conferences. Missing how these may reinforce culture's "relentless focus on weight and appearance" (Van Leeuwen *et al*. 1993: 337), she muses that they were a good idea on God's part (Houston 2016 81-82). Van Leeuwen *et al.* state that sadly, rather than looking to the Bible for points of resistance to appearance-focused femininity, Christianity more often than not complies with and even appropriates the mainstream's ideals for beauty (1993: 337-338). They note that the "points of resistance" to the "tyranny of fashion" come from the "secular marketplace" and not from "mainstream or evangelical Christianity" (Van Leeuwen *et al.* 1993: 337-338).

Calling for abandonment of traditional expressions of femininity as dictated by women's and girl's magazines (McRobbie 2009: 161), Braidotti states that feminism is a politics that essentially "rejects the sanctimonious, dogmatic tone of dominant ideologies...in favour of joyful acts of insurrection" (2015: 241). This includes an "experimental approach to changing our collective modes of relation to the environment, social and other, our cultural norms and values, our social imaginary, our bodies, [and] ourselves" (Braidotti 2015: 241). "Progressive emancipator measures" include "radical experiments with self-styling or critical praxis" (Braidotti 2015: 140). It is precisely the 'monstrous' lurking behind the mask of perfectibility that holds the potential for transformation—total failure provides "the kind of crack or rupture" necessary for change (Braidotti 2015: 140).

4.3 The Difference between 'Leadership' and 'Headship'

Deferring descriptions of its 'make-over' focused 'practical sessions', Hillsong South Africa describes Shine as helping women "develop an understanding of her own personal worth, strength and purpose and realize the potential within her to live her best life" (Hillsong 2016: /southafrica/life-courses/). In the Hillsong Copenhagen version the description includes: "Shine encourages participants to find the strength and courage within them to make healthy choices" (Hillsong: /copenhagen/sisterhood/shine/). Hillsong's 'programme' for boys of the same age, entitled Strength, is articulated here as equipping individuals "to become effective global leaders for the future" (Hillsong 2016: /southafrica/life-courses/). Topics covered by Strength are listed as "significance and personal identity, resilience and decision-making, courage and goal setting" (*ibid.*)

If these or other 'leadership qualities' are perhaps secretly taught to girls in the Shine programme, they do not appear on any of the course descriptions. 'Living her best life', 'understanding your own, personal worth', and finding the inner strength to 'make healthy choices' seems an almost sad

compensation for what may have been lost in her failed project of self-determination, strongly contrasting the promising outlook of being an 'effective global leader of the future'. To shine means that one exudes a light that gives shape to something beyond the self (or to be 'spectacular' in a glamorous sort of way), to reside over the quality of 'strength' suggests standing fast, exerting influence, or resisting opposition.

Splitting the two programmes (Shine and Strength) along the 'gender line' means each can be tailored according to those characteristics traditionally associated with men and women respectively. As Braidotti writes, "classical universalism, which conflates the masculine and the white with the universal and confines the feminine to a secondary position of difference...creates binary differences only to ordain them in a hierarchical scale of power relations" (Braidotti 1994a: 98). The characteristics 'allocated' women are usually 'negative', such as: passivity, negativity, introvertedness, emotionality and wishfulness, weakness and being easily influenced (Tong 2009: 55-56, 132, 201, 276). Shine, similarly, seems to take a 'correctional' approach, launching off the premise that personal 'worth, strength and purpose' is somehow 'lacking' in young girls. Gwendolyn Mikell talks about "mythical or ritual circumscriptions or prohibitions" (often stemming from Traditional, Islamic, or Christian belief systems) that 'evoke' women's naturalised "'inability' to acquire new levels of skills appropriate to…leadership" (1997: 15). Strength, on the other hand 'equips'—i.e. 'adds value to' a subject already brimming with potential. By stating directly that it sees in its participants the 'leaders of the future', one may assume they preside over those 'leadership qualities' traditionally associated with men. As highlighted by writers such as Helene Cixous, and Shulamith Firestone (Tong 2009), men are attributed 'leadership 'traits such as objectiveness, logic, extrovertedness, being rational and pragmatic, activeness, autonomy and justice.[174] [175]

[174] It is interesting to note that, Colour Conference invitations from its early years, in both representation and content seem to display a more progressive attitude toward pursuing women's empowerment. The first conferences in the late-90's and early-2000's listed workshops that, for example, always including one on women in their careers, and many using 'empowering language'. As an example, a 1999 invitation description reads "The whole woman—godly, assertive, individual and courageously confident! (including, returning to the workforce with knock-em-dead confidence)" (Colour Your World Women's Conference 1999).

[175] Shine implements 27 programmes across South Africa (Hillsong 2016: /southafrica/shine/). In a jarring contrast to a programme for young women seemingly facilitated by, as called for by Wrethman, make-up and nail artists and hairdressers, South African women-led N.G.O, '18twenty8' takes a very different approach in their 'life-skills workshops' for girls. Focused on Grade 11 and 12 learners, a series of workshops entitled 'Green Girls Workshop', 'Hip and Healthy Workshop', 'Education Workshop', 'Professional Day Workshop' and 'Self-Empowerment Workshop' offer education around issues such as "urban environmental awareness and conservation", "HIV/AIDS", "sexual responsibility and planned pregnancy", "anti-rape", funding and transitioning into higher education, careers, "assertiveness", and "financial freedom" (among others). Volunteers who present with 18twenty8's include those knowledgeable on HIV/AIDS such as 'Positive Women's Network', professionals to expose young women to a variety of careers, and instructors to teach

Because the Colour Sisterhood movement, and its 'parent', Hillsong, is, as we have seen throughout this work, indivisible from Bobbie and husband Brian Houston, it may worthwhile to continue the investigation into whether and how gender is dichotomised by looking at the couple's own representations by their movement (s). The couple often describe their relationship as being a very effective, active and equal partnership in both leadership and home. In *I'll Have What She's Having: The Ultimate Compliment for any Woman Daring To Change Her World* Houston writes: "Brian and I pastor Hillsong Church together. We both carry the calling, mandate and dream...I choose to be active, involved and committed. I choose to be on the front row—alive, attentive and enthused. I choose to lead by example...Briand and I are called together, but it is not a power struggle because we choose to understand the dynamic of partnership—we complement and complete one another" (2008: 154-155).

At the 2017 Colour Conference in Cape Town, a large, meticulously designed stall in the 'outer sanctuary' lobby, named 'Brian and Bobbie's Resources', displayed and sold a vast array of their books and teaching material. It may be relevant to note that, similarly to the stall (and how it was named) at conference, the couple's resources are grouped together as 'Brian and Bobbie' categories within the drop down menus for 'book's, 'teaching' and 'curriculum' on the Hillsong website's resources portal. Most of the Houston's resources feature portraits of the individuals. We know that the couple, and consequently their viewpoints, are at the epicentre of the two movements, and that they would therefore be conscious of the message they exude. We also know that Hillsong is meticulous in their visual marketing strategies, and therefore it is safe to assume very little is left to chance.

When looking at Bobbie Houston's printed resources throughout the years, most noticeable is how a side or semi-side profile is favoured for her cover-portraits. A departure is the recently published booklet called 'Colour Through the Years', where the same image of Bobbie Houston that appears on the back cover of *Stay The Path* (2017) shows her directly from the front. As examples of the sideways trope, covers of *The Sisterhood* (2016) (fig. 10) and *I'll Have What She's Having: The Ultimate Compliment for any Woman Daring To Change Her World* (2009) (fig. 11) show Houston in this way, laughing and looking out beyond the cover to an unseen subject. Looking vibrant and tan, her long hair is styled in wispy highlighted layers. On the cover of *The Sisterhood*, Houston, wearing a plain white long-sleeved shirt over a plain black top, holds her hands together in front of her against an opaque, greyish-blue background. She seems to gently stroke or fiddle with her wedding

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them how to defend themselves physically in harmful situations. Themes focusing on 'appearance' are defined in empowering and practical terms as 'personal hygiene' and 'grooming and presentation skills'. See 18twenty8. s.a. [O]. Available: http://www.18twenty8.org/workshops. [2018, August]

ring. Set against a plain white background, Houston, in *I'll Have What She's Having* holds an open book, likely the Bible, her wedding ring again prominently visible. In a simple black long-sleeve top, she appears in 'conversation' with someone above and beyond the book cover. The text on both covers is an elegant serif font.

Brian Houston, however, directly gazes at the camera on *Live Love Lead* (2015) (fig. 13), *How to Maximise Your Life* (2013) (fig. 12) and *There Is More: When The World Says You Can't, God Says You Can* (2018) (fig. 14). Featured in neat, unassuming 'business wear' (a black collar shirt in *Live Love Lead*, and a black suit jacket over a white shirt on the other two covers), he also smiles joyfully, but in contrast to Bobbie Houston, looks directly at the viewer. In *There is More* he is sitting against a white curtain as backdrop, slightly turned to the right, his hands resolutely clasped together with his wedding ring also prominently visible. *In Live Love Lead*, his arms are confidently folded across his chest, a vague 'ghost image' in the almost black background show worshipping church goers behind him. All three book titles are printed in a bold, uppercase, sans serif font.

Gender differences here may perhaps seem subtle—being not really evident in the 'obvious' devices of clothing, backgrounds or colour use (although the title of *I'll Have What She's Having* is printed in a bright pink). The covers all are neatly designed with a straight-forward, 'clean' layout. One may perhaps note that Bobbie Houston is lit using a soft, 'flattering' diffuse light, while Brian Houston's features are more strongly emphasised in a light that makes for strong contrasts and shadows to undercut his 'manly' neck or jaw line. However, seeing the books side by side, it is undeniably striking how Brian Houston's confident, direct confrontation immediately seems to demand one's full attention. The message seems to be that Brian Houston has the secret to success and 'you' (as addressed by Houston in these books—supposedly a reader to whom gender is not ascribed) are the privileged recipient of his wisdom.

In comparison, Bobbie Houston's covers bring to the table a third party—whom is she looking out towards? It may be to God for guidance (as she appears to look 'up' from her Bible in *I'll Have What She's Having*); perhaps it is Brian, who partners with her in everything. Or, it could be that she is looking to the 'other woman/women', beyond herself and the reader, reinforcing the notion of women being in a state of 'connectedness'. This may be plausible since, different to Brian's (who may be addressing readers from either sex), Bobbie's books address 'women' specifically, their titles, as seen, also referencing women other than the reader herself.

Whatever the case, in having 'turned away', Houston forgoes the 'directness', 'boldness' and self assertiveness in addressing her reader that is so prominently carried by, as Hillsong describes Brian

Houston " the dad of the house" (https://hillsong.com/brian-bobbie/). As discussed in the first chapter, the "political economy of faces" embodies power—codifies it, "distributes it, organizes, allocates it" (Braidotti 2015). Power, as already described, plays out within and across every form of discourse. As Van Leeuwen *et al*. note: "In whatever form, symbolic expression becomes culture's playing field for gender definition and management" (1993: 301). Here, the contrast reminds of John Berger's assertion that "a man's presence is dependent upon the promise of power which he embodies. If the promise is large and credible his presence is striking" (Berger 1972: 45). The presence of women, on the other hand, gives the sense that "her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another" (Berger 1972: 47). Echoing their portraits, the title of Brian Houston's books (seemingly in the genre of self-help books) suggest a desire and formula for 'largeness'—for exceeding a 'greatness' that is already in place, whereas Bobbie Houston's books, addressed to women specifically (and in contrast to the actual content), are non-prescriptive.

Figure 10: Houston, B. Cover of The Sisterhood. 2016

(Image downloaded from: https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/29408781-the-sisterhood)

Figure 11: Houston, B. Cover of I'll Have What She's Having: The Ultimate Compliment for any Woman Daring To Change Her World . 2009

(Image downloaded from: https://www.amazon.co.uk/Ill-Have-What-Shes-Having/dp/0849919770)

Figure 12: Houston, B. Cover of How To Maximize Your Life. 2013.

(Image downloaded from: https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/18288108-how-to-maximise-your-life)

Figure 13: Houston, B. Cover of Live Love Lead. 2015.

(Image downloaded from: https://www.amazon.com/Live-Love-Lead-Your-Best/dp/1455533424)

Figure 14: Houston, B. There is More. 2018.

(Image downloaded from: https://www.amazon.com/There-More-When-World-Says/dp/073529061X)

On the Hillsong website's page 'Brian and Bobbie', juxtaposed biographical paragraphs read for the couple respectively:

> As a leader, Pastor Brian Houston is highly regarded for his boldness, innovation and vision. As a church pastor, he is well respected for his passion for the cause of Christ and the local church, and for preaching messages that change mindsets and ministries. But at HOME—Hillsong Church—Pastor Brian is most loved for being the 'dad of the house' –a pastor who loves God and people, and a speaker of life who declares, 'The best is yet to come'.
>
> Pastor Bobbie Houston is passionate about seeing all people find Jesus as their Saviour, gain a revelation of their value in Him and rise up to make a stand for justice on the earth. She is

> a beloved Pastor with a prophetic teaching gift, and has redefined the face of 'women's ministry', raising up a capable company of women through a local Hillsong Sisterhood, global Colour Sisterhood and flourishing annual Colour Conferences that take place across five nations. (https://hillsong.com/brian-bobbie/)

Again, the very first sentence of Brian Houston's biography attributes to him a number of favourable 'leadership' characteristics lacking in the paragraph on Bobbie Houston. While Bobbie Houston herself has proven, over a number of years to be an equally 'bold', 'visionary', and 'innovative' speaker and leader, she often offers 'apologetic' statements on these qualities (while also, as seen in Chapter 1, not being 'apologetic' about the control she maintains in the Colour Sisterhood movement). As an example, early on in *The Sisterhood* she states, "Even now, as the wife of a well-known pastor and leader of a prominent church, I can easily slip into the realm of 'reluctant leader' and allow others to take the spotlight. It is only my convictions about certain things that push me over the line and compel me to stand up and speak out" (Houston 2016: 9). This sentiment was repeated during the 2017 Colour Conference in Cape Town.

While Houston asserts in *The Sisterhood* (2016) that Hillsong has women in leadership positions in its different areas and platforms, and while attention is often called to that the Houstons started and run Hillsong *together*, it seems as if the movements are wary not to overstep the boundaries of male 'headship'. [176] Maddox noted that Brian Houston spoke of a "conservative, biblical idea that a man should take a role of leadership in his life" (Maddox 2013a: 14-15). It appears that women are negotiated a place in 'co-leadership' with men, but not necessarily as part of a 'co-headship'. An example may be the lack of female representatives within Hillsong's own 'broader' leadership, such as its 'Board', where among 12 members, only one, Lalitha Stables (mentioned in Chapter 2) is a woman (Hillsong 2016: /leadership/board/). The 10 'Elders' are only men (Hillsong 2016: /australia/eldership/).[177]

Unapologetically advocated by Gray, strongly implemented by Shine, and subtly suggested in representations of Brian and Bobbie Houston, complementarity and the dichotomising of gender by assigning to women problematic, traditional 'traits' go unattested within the Colour Sisterhood. What really is missing from a movement claiming to champion women's 'empowerment' is a pursuit of radical alternatives to these representations—new ways to see, as Wolf writes, if women are to

[176] In the *Inside Story* documentary on Hillsong (displayed on the Brian and Bobbie Hillsong webpage) the fact that the couple started the church 'together' is affirmed time and time again by the couple and family members throughout the film (https://hillsong.com/brian-bobbie/).

[177] Maddox notes that early Pentecostalism, believing in Holy Spirit ordained vocations had a vast number of women start and lead churches (2013a: 13). However, there are but a few traces of this egalitarianism today (Maddox 2013a: 14).

free themselves from, for example, the "beauty myth" that is "destroying women physically and depleting us psychologically" (2002: 19). If the movement is to be seen as holding its own with feminist politics, we may demand more points of resistance, or departures from traditional hegemonic ways of representing the feminine as well as masculine subject. Braidotti states that what feminist politics in essence does are work through "transformative experiments" joining hands with "new technologies of the self, new arts of existence and ethical relations" (Braidotti 2015: 140).

4.4 The Colour Sisterhood as 'Above Feminism'

'Feminism' remains an evasive term within the Colour Sisterhood discourse; however, as we have seen, its 'rhetorical ideology' is built around the feminist notion of 'women's empowerment'. A reroute of this 'ideology' seems to take place in the recently (2018) published 'purpose and mission statement' for the Colour Sisterhood. Doing away with the movement's slogan "placing value upon womanhood", "placing value upon humanity" (Hillsong: colour/sisterhood/what-we-believe/) is offered in its place. In the text, 'feminist' rhetoric is waived in favour of a humanist perspective. An example reads: "We do justice when we give all human beings their due as creations of God...It consists of a broad range of activities, from simple, fair and honest dealings with people in daily life, to regular, radically generous giving of your time and resources, to activism that seeks to end particular forms of injustice, violence and oppression". The oppression of 'women' is side-lined while those nouns that have more commonly been associated with victimhood are highlighted: "orphans, widows, immigrants...foreigners...the poor...the refugee, the migrant worker, the homeless...single parents...elderly people" (*ibid.*).

Bobbie Houston seems to suggest throughout her book and on-stage rhetoric that the Sisterhood has 'come of age', and the shift to a more 'humanitarian' aspect is testament to this (2016: 100-101). Of course, as Braidotti writes, the desire for transformation should take as its key issues "violence, freedom, poverty, dignity, legality [and] self-determination" (2015: 240). However, it ought to be firstly about unveiling power relations "in the specific locations of one's own...existence...[and] practices" (Braidotti 2015: 240). The theology of 'flourishing', however (as seen in preceding two chapters) instead hampers this very crucial factor of 'situatedness' by positioning the Sisterhood as a 'saviourhood' that exists against a polarizing symbolic 'victimhood'.

The purpose and mission statement as a whole addresses the reader as the 'bringer of justice'—again, being 'found' in a purpose (as written on in Chapter 2) is celebrated as part of the 'moment of liberation'. Houston, in the first 'sermon' she delivered at the 2017 Cape Town Colour Conference, states that "when we align our heart with His (God's) kingdom cause, when we stand...besides those

white harvest fields, and the things that break His heart and concern His heart, He falls more in love with us. He loves us because we have chosen to lean in" (Houston 2017: 14: 55). The 'harvest fields', as discussed in Chapter 2, is analogous for injustice, victims, violence, or the 'unsaved'—and the prize for being actively 'involved' is the love and favour of God.

As seen in Xanele's story (discussed in Chapter 2) one crosses a symbolic border from 'victimhood' to 'sister/saviourhood'— the latter being defined in elitist terms where an idealised flourishing womanhood helping to save the world is imagined as the norm for the Sisterhood women. In this 'heaven-ordained' womanhood, having found her place carefully nestled in between her 'freedom' to lead and her complementary status to man, the individual transcends the limitations and expectations imposed upon her from 'the outside'. I have already discussed how the Colour Sisterhood femininity is represented as being above and beyond the 'things of this world', showing how 'Colour Sisterhood womanhood' is depicted as purified, transcendental, ideally beautiful and 'mythical' in contrast to the 'world', which offers a glimpse at harsh realities and victimhood. The message directed at the Sisterhood presupposes that, similar to what McRobbie (2009) argues of representations of gender equality within popular culture, the battle (here, for the Sisterhood women) has already been won.[178]

I do not wish to suggest that the movement is 'blind' to all issues that may face its members on a personal basis (although, of course, I have noted a lack of ground-level avenues for collective activation, especially in South Africa), but that the *representations* of its femininity dare not depict anything otherwise than being, as we described in the previous section and as Maddox articulates Houston's words, "gorgeously available" for God (Maddox 2013a: 23). When things are out of place, it is suggested that they are probably that way as part of a greater 'divinely ordained' plan. Gray, in an analogy comparing women's menstrual cycles to 'bad' cycles in their lives, states that these should not end because they are necessary in order to 'birth something big and vast'— this 'something' "will make the pain worth it" (Gray 2017a: 25:35). When changes *are* to be made, the onus falls upon the women to make them.[179]

[178] In the final chapter of *The Sisterhood* Houston writes "we either believe that we are created gender-equal with a world to influence and rule in together, or we don't. So if we do, let's relax into it and get on with the job of working alongside one another in the grand scheme of God's master plan for the earth" (2016: 249). She continues later on that the mandate for 'Colour' was and is: "She smiles at the future, lives life magnificently, executes justice on the earth, and places value upon humanity" (Houston 2016: 254).

[179] As mentioned before in previous chapter, Houston, describing flourishing', states that "it didn't matter that the gardens of their lives was imperfect or in disrepair. The challenge was to go home and try to make it better. If marriages were suffering, then let's be courageous enough to make the adjustments needed" (2016: 230). As we have seen from Maddox, that these adjustments may include 'getting out' of harmful relationships, seems unlikely.

A message empowering women, calling them to live fully and purposefully, and imagining a future where equality has indeed been achieved, both subjectively and in reality, such as suggested by Colour Sisterhood imagery and the 'flourish' philosophy, may of course read as reflecting what has been called 'power-feminism'—the antithesis of so-called 'victim-feminism'. Feminists such as Naomi Wolf call on women to challenge their "fear of power", their "cynicism" and "uncertainty", and realize that they are not "at the mercy of historical events" (Wolf 1993:235). Within her description of 'power feminism', she suggests, among many other things, that it:

- encourages a woman to claim her individual voice rather than merging her voice in a collective identity
- seeks power and uses it responsibly, both for women as individuals and to make the world more fair to others
- wants women to acquire money, both for their own dreams, independence, and security, and for social change
- acknowledges women's interest in 'signature', recognition and fame
- asks a women to give to herself and seek what she needs, so she can give to others freely, without resentment
- has a psychology of abundance; wants all women to "equalize upward" and get more; believes women deserve to feel the qualities of stars and queens, of sensuality and beauty, can be theirs. (Wolf 1993: 137-138)

I've highlighted from Wolf's list those points I feel resonate strongly with the 'flourish theology' of the movement. However, in contrast to 'femininity' reading as sanctified saviourhood, Wolf clearly states that "in reassigning women the status of saints or martyrs, *victim* feminism recreates the old trap that women have to be better in order to be equal. If we suppress the truth that sometimes women do have choices and consciously choose to do wrong, then we have fallen short of what should be our fundamental feminist goal: laying claim to our humanity, all of it, not just the scenic parts" (my emphaisis) (Wolf 1993: 232). She states that true equality means that the world is "thrown open to all women regardless of their goodness" (Wolf 1993: 139). Of course, representing the Sisterhood collectivity only in terms of the 'scenic parts' suggest that the issues facing womanhood, being instead relegated to 'others', are for the Sisterhood stripped away, sanctified or forgotten. Again, I suggest that this is the case at its representational level where femininity becomes rhetorically and visually defined (and subjectively inscribed as a kind of 'token femininity').

The Colour Sisterhood arguably engages elements from a kind of 'positive' feminism as listed above, as well as those from a post-feminist sensibility such as the fashion-beauty complex, a focus on

individualism (as seen in Chapter 3) and a (faux) freedom that depends on male approval. Postfeminism, as argued by McRobbie (2009), collapses feminist politics, paradoxically, by taking it into account and then suggesting that it is no longer needed. Women are free to choose to once again subject themselves to those mainstream forms of representations under the guise of 'empowerment'. The Colour Sisterhood movement, on the other hand, instead of suggesting that a political movement driving equality (whether or not called by the name 'feminism') either was and is no longer, or continues to be necessary, its representations of femininity instead uphold spiritual sanctification, collective participation in the rites of the movement, adherence to its character 'blue-print' for womanhood, and the subsequent 'mobilisation' by any of its proposed means, as a 'formula' for a coherent, 'whole' femininity.

This 'formula' is tied to the 'Colour Sisterhood' as a movement and an ideology replacing political activism from elsewhere. This speaks of the 'dominionist flavour" (as identified by Maddox) that is present in Hillsong's teaching to both men and women—the notion that Christians need to "take control of political institutions, running them according to (a particular concept of) divine law" (2013a:21). 'Divine' law therefore, is above earthly law, and it seems, a divinely ordained women's coalition is similarly 'above' those movements initiated from the secular. We see that, while Houston offers a dedication to "precious sisters who have gone before—women who have walked paths that we may never have to travel, who paved a way and paid a price for freedoms we know", in *The Sisterhood*, the book essentially only recognises and applauds the Colour Sisterhood as furthering the female cause, without actual references to other movements or institutions outside their own circle. [180] [181]

There are within *The Sisterhood* those references that do seem to promote inclusivity and mutuality. An example is when Houston describes the 'African Sisterhood', saying that the relationship was a 'two-way street" where "their beautiful lives had been helped by us" but "their examples of courage, bravery, endurance, grace forgiveness, and sheer overcoming spirit" were "deeply inspiring" (Houston 2016: 166). The problem is that the Sisterhood is spoken of in 'global' (pan-humanist) terms until there seems to come a welfare divide, where the Sisterhood itself seems to be subjected to an 'Us' (from a middle-to-higher income environment) and ' Them' (from a low- or lower –middle-income environment). Of course, this divide is necessary in order for the movement to continue its

[180] See Houston's rhetoric on how the deaths of Princess Diana and Mother Theresa in 1997 coincide (as 'seeds' now planted in the earth that will bring forth a host of women of 'royal stance') with the advent of the Colour Sisterhood (Houston 2016: 46-47).

[181] 'Gathering the women' is seen by Houston as an essential part in end-time theology—she describes that God will return to the earth once 'equality' has been achieved (2016: 102-103, 248-255). In this context, the Colour Sisterhood is heralded as the means to this end.

promotion of the view that, as described my Maddox in terms of the "prosperity gospel", "wealth, like salvation, is available to all who have faith enough to receive it" (Maddox 2013b: 3). As we have seen numerous times, this notion is almost fundamental within the 'flourish theology', and highly promoted within the resources, sermons and performances, and general world-view of the Hillsong and Colour Sisterhood movements. Those who are part of 'the Sisterhood' but are practically and logistically 'outside' this realm of prosperity and possibility are therefore necessarily filtered from representation, their presence instead linked to the 'plight' of the victim, rather than a norm or as part of the solution. There is not, as hooks laments through the words of Richard Foster (who uses an example from the scriptures of Paul), the notion that "we ought to deal with the class and status distinction to the extent that we can be freely among the lowly" (Hooks 2000b: 44).

Returning to the notion of 'divine law' (as dictated by Hillsong, and subsequently by the Colour Sisterhood), it appears to trump any earthly means of achieving justice, which may allow the movement to deny or appropriate 'secular' ideals as they see fit. On how Hillsong women embrace mainstream beauty ideals as part of 'divinely ordained womanhood', for example, Maddox writes: "God's plan for human life includes strong gender differentiation, which, for women, is normatively expressed though hyperfeminine aesthetic of fashion, makeup, attention to hair and nails" (2013b: 5).

The coupling of moral, 'religiously inspired' blog posts to the genre of the fashion image, such as in the example of Esther Houston's blog, further demonstrates this point. Fashion and beauty are referents loosened from their (earthly) meanings and histories to become 'symbols' within a new, 'separate' system.[182] Almost religiously, what was 'before' has been changed into something that now stands at the service of this 'divine'. That these elements, now 'sanctified', are too reflective of women's representations within the oppressive system of patriarchy is perhaps, rather than regrettable, highly convenient, enabling the movement to stay fashionably within the parameters of the hyper-consumerist, hyper-individualist and appearance-orientated economy of today.

My argument here is that the Colour Sisterhood representations of femininity allude to feminism only in that it sees itself as being 'above feminism'. Holding similarities with post-feminist renderings, the 'above-feminism' position seems to take feminism into account.[183] However, under

[182] Van Leeuwen *et al.* note, for example, how Christianity has assimilated the mainstream's ideals on beauty and thinness into the Biblical notion of the body being 'a temple of the Holy Spirit' (1994: 269)—a phrase that could have potentially disrupted rather than reinforced the "relentless focus" on these attributes (1994: 337).
[183] We have seen how many of the movement's rendering refer to 'feminist' activities. An example is the 2019 invitation depicting, with imagery, attire, props and photography filters reminisce of 1960's (the beginning of second wave feminism) women gathering to demonstrate with posters, banners and flyers. Some of the images are grainy and blurred, jarred, scratched and rendered in burned out tones, images from different

the guise of 'empowerment', highly-gendered representations of womanhood continue to be re-appropriated and re-inscribed—albeit now 'purified' from its prior undesirable histories, into a supposedly 'divine order' ('freedom and leadership' within Godly-ordained submission). Being 'above feminism' also means the movement need not feel pressed to answer to those political 'feminist' issues that may cause controversies for religious institutions—or may do so from a distance, waiving the need for real conversations or debates around these issues. We have already seen in previous chapters examples of how discourses around women's daily experiences taking place in the context of the movement are choreographed to fit within the parameters of its idealised femininity.

Within this context, sisterhood women are 'set apart'—what was before has been stripped away, sanctified or forgotten. Like Simone de Beauvoir's 'Sovereigns'—'Colour Sisterhood' women, like Queens historically, transcends their sex by "divine right" and "shining virtues" (1949: 144-145).[184] The flourish theology allows women to be mobilised from a transcendental place of 'abundance' where they excel in, as listed by Houston, the areas 'compulsory' to the fulfilling of 'God's commission'—parenting, marriage, careers, callings, "God-entrusted gifts", compassion and kindness (2016: 230-231).[185] [186] She is able to offer her "*filled* hands to the needy" (Houston 2016: 101).

Within this environment of 'flourishing', the Colour Sisterhood women are not deviant, outcast or oppressed. They are not poor, abused or struggling with mental issues. They do not face gender discrimination (they are heterosexual), nor are they in a position where they may be considering abortion. The lack of engagement on issues such as those listed above—except for when admeasured to the 'victim other'—suggests that the 'battle' for the Sisterhood woman has already been won. The other side of the scale then suggests that the goodness/future/equality/freedom/financial security of one group relies on that of another which is construed as already presiding over such qualities. This 'sanitized' version of femininity forgets that transformation often comes precisely because there are cracks or ruptures.

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conference years playing inserted sporadically in short, ad hoc bursts. The style seems reflective of propaganda films or documentaries.

[184] As already described in Chapter 2 via Maddox, a persistent icon for femininity within the movement is that of a 'princess'.

[185] The 2019 Colour Conference invitation reads "Salvation is no small thing. It's where the past and all that is broken and lost is replaced with all that is new and wondrous" (Hillsong 2016: /colour/capetown/). This is at odds with Biblical narratives that often describe the 'suffering' of saints.

[186] As discussed in Chapter 2, it is, however, often those without entitlement rights that participate in or initiate acts of transformation.

Conclusion

The introduction to this chapter touched on how religion and feminism have often struggled to reconcile. Even so, Braidotti notes that "however proud twentieth-century feminism may be of its secular roots" (2013:32), "feminist theology in the Christian, Muslim, and Judaic traditions produced well-established communities of both critical resistance and affirmation of creative alternatives (2013: 33). Butler talks about 'non-foundational coalitional politics', saying that while the "insistence in advance on coalitional 'unity' as a goal assumes that solidarity, whatever its price, is a prerequisite for political action...perhaps coalition needs to acknowledge its contradictions and take action with those contradictions intact" (Butler 1990: 14). This means the acceptance of "divergence, breakage, splinter and fragmentation as part of the often tortuous process of democratization"; however, "provisional unities might emerge in the context of concrete actions" (Butler 1990: 14-15).

Within the micro-narrative of the Colour Sisterhood, coalition (not with feminism, but between its own members) does come with a presupposed 'unity', or a specific identity as premise. This identity is firstly described through imagery and discourse in terms of gender complementarity and heteronormativity where woman is seen as 'helper', 'multiplier' or 'enhancer' of man. This notion was widely and boldly articulated by Gray during the 2017 Colour Conference. Complementarity relies on dichotomising gender differences through assigning to women those 'traits' that have traditionally (and often 'negatively') been associated with 'women', such as hyper-emotionality, non-rationality and dependability. Women are seen as 'natural' nurturers, and are expected to lay down their own desires and ambitions in order help 'others' achieve theirs. However, as argued of Gray's performances in previous chapters, these notions are glossed over with notions women's 'spectacular' spiritual empowerment.

'Beauty' and 'fashion', as directly or indirectly advocated by Houston, serve as celebrated markers for gender differentiation. As seen in Chapter 2, the marketing material for the Colour Sisterhood offer little departure from mainstream beauty ideals. In fact, as seen in this chapter, the Shine programme, represented during the Colour Conferences, uses beauty and make-overs as foundational 'tools' for teaching young women their value. By offering links to and suggesting reading of Esther Houston's glamorous and provocative fashion blog, Hillsong is happy to promote Christian ethos along with popular culture's 'appearance-focused' femininity.

As discussed in the preceding chapters, and expanded on here, representations of the Colour Sisterhood femininity, being founded on a theology of 'flourishing', propose a mythical 'transcendence' to a womanhood that exists outside and beyond the 'problems' and 'issues' of 'this

world'. Sisterhood women are presented as sovereigns, mythical beings, or 'bringers of justice' set against the polarising notion of 'victim others'. Because of the ordination of 'compulsory flourishing', the facilitation of discussions or activations that could address 'issues' its own members may face on a daily basis are instead framed in relation to a 'victimhood' outside the movement. In this sense, while 'feminist' rhetoric may be present, the movement essentially posits itself as 'above feminism'.

This position does not only reflect an ideological orientation, but sadly negates the fundamental pursuits of feminist politics. Feminist politics, as described by Braidotti, "expresses the desire for transformations by taking as its starting point the embodied and embedded, affective and relational structure of our social relations, the mixture of personal and collective, the intimate and the public...This insight translates into an active involvement in the politics of everyday life, where 'life' is not taken for granted, but is approached as an ethical-political praxis of struggle, confrontation – critique and creativity joining hands." (2015: 240). Hassim writes that "feminist movements seek to challenge those roles and articulate a democratic vision of society in which gender is not the basis for a hierarchy of power" (2004: 4). Rather than embracing those representations, myths, symbols around femininity deemed by Western society as "natural" or "inevitable", feminist politics works toward "a vision of the subject as process", taking into account a "multiplicity of variables of definition of female subjectivity"—"a de-essentialisation in all...aspects" (Braidotti 1994a: 98-99).

Conclusion

In this thesis I aimed to, through a critical exploration of the narrative, visual, performative, as well as spatial aspects of Hillsong's Colour Sisterhood movement and Colour Conference 2017 in Cape Town, answer the question: 'is the Colour Sisterhood movement relevant to the formation of feminist subjectivities within the context of South Africa?'. I entered this discussion through the work of Hassim who argues that, in lieu of a strong feminist movement in South Africa, non-political, community-based feminine movements must be recognised as role-players in transformational politics (Hassim 1991, 2004, 2005). In this view, such movements may become valuable sites for fostering subjectivities that can be mobilised in pursuit of feminist aims (Hassim 2004, 2005, 2006, Lewis 2008).

When I started this study, I was hopeful, or if I had to be honest, excited at the prospect that the Colour Sisterhood as a massive, creatively-driven, faith-based and global 'women's movement' may offer a space that brings together, and champions the empowerment of, South African women. I was eager to see whether, at a representational level, the Colour Sisterhood would creatively redress those mainstream representations that distort the image of 'woman', deny women equality or undermine diversity within the category of 'woman'. In describing the context of my research question, I wrote that, within South Africa, the failure of the state to implement women's rights beyond discourse is an important issue (Hassim 2005, Manicom 2005), and part of the reason why ground-level transformation has been slow is the failure of "'Westocentric' citizen theory" to politically define 'woman' in terms of diversity and difference (Manicom 2005: 28).

My excitement therefore escalated when, upon arriving at the conference for the first time, I observed a truly culturally diverse audience— as advertised, thousands of women from different ethnic backgrounds had gathered; a site which in other contexts has been rare in South Africa. During the first worship session, I enjoyed hearing my black African sisters ululating loudly in worship in the rows behind me, appreciating this 'traditional' women's' sound reverberating within the contemporary worship atmosphere. In that moment, there was a feeling of unity, of joyful harmony and loving recognition between the women that to me was wonderful. By the end of that first night, I returned home feeling on the one hand exhilarated and on the other an immense sense of tragic disappointment. It was difficult to articulate that feeling, but it was as though I was mourning the loss of an important promise that would not be fulfilled.

Applying a 'feminist reading' to movements such as Hillsong and the Colour Sisterhood can rightfully be described as a task that is complex and comes with a lot of responsibility. The rich and intricate

history of Pentecostalism and its emerging social cultures are a phenomenon that continues to stir a wide range of inquiry, study and publication, attesting to the many facets that inform its subsequent ideologies. While this study, perhaps regrettably, cannot consider all these aspects, but rather focuses on a particular culture and specific event that has emerged from the broader neo-Pentecostal environment, I do not wish to suggest that we should apply a simplistic reading of neo-Pentecostal discourse. I've attempted to argue as much for the 'possibility' and 'potential' for Pentecostal ideology (in that it is 'homeground' in this case) to offer points of resistance to debilitating hegemonic representations of 'woman', as well as points of connection for forging new solidarities, as I have of the shortcomings in these regards within the Colour Sisterhood movement.

Also, 'feminism' as an ideology has not been without definitional turmoil (hooks 1984: 17), and recently many questions have been raised on 'what it means to be feminist'.[187] Rosemarie Tong highlights the diverse streams of thought within feminism that have led to its categorical manifestations through various (sub) labels: "liberal, radical, Marxist/socialist, psychoanalytic, care-focused, multicultural/global/colonial, ecofeminist, and postmodern/third wave" (Tong 2009: 1)—and now, 'fourth wave feminism', to name but a few. Traditional liberal and radical feminist thinking, for example, often have had very different approaches to women's liberation, and have also come into conflict and criticism (Tong 2009).[188]

Calling for nomadic consciousness is a way, I believe, to address the problem of simply scrutinising one hegemonic institution (the Colour Sisterhood) with another ('feminism'). While I hope the

[187] As an example, reports on the 2017 Women's March highlight debates and uncertainties surrounding the feminist subject. Who was included? Who was not? Could women stand together at the intersection of beliefs and causes? Who was feminism for? While the march was organised around defending the rights of women, there seemed to be a considerable amount of energy, space and time dedicated to defending the rights of certain groups of women to be or not to be considered 'feminist' (Desmond-Harris 2017, Hart 2017, Tolentino 2017).

[188] Liberal feminism, with its focus on the "socially constructed gender roles", worked toward eliminating "discriminatory educational, legal and economic policies" (Tong 2009: 48). Amid its various contributions to the work of women's liberation, liberal feminism is scrutinised for failing to acknowledge the variegated plateaus of difference (Tong 2009: 43-45) —having been called a white, middle class women's feminism (Tong 2009: 45, Van Leeuwen *et al.* 1993: 47). Hooks noted within liberal feminism a "devaluation of black femininity, and the sidelining of women of colour"—in effect reinforcing racism and classism (Munro 2014). Classical liberal feminism furthermore advocated the privatisation of religious and sexual life, "insisting that it be neither socially judged nor legally regulated (Van Leeuwen *et al.* 1993: 61). Radical feminism took a more revolutionary view of women's oppression as being "the most fundamental form of human oppression—one that precedes, outstrips, and perhaps even explains oppression based on class, race, military might, or any other type of power" (Van Leeuwen *et al.* 1993: 56). They ushered in what has probably been feminism's most prolific slogan: "the personal is political" (Tong 2009: 49). Radical feminism desires to "retrieve what previously silenced or marginalised women" (Tong 2009: 89-95). As such it was sometimes seen, especially in its early days, as promulgated anti-family and anti-biological motherhood sentiments, and was criticised for its apparent 'rejection of femininity' (Tong 2009: 85-95, Van Leeuwen *et al.* 1993: 59). Radical feminism, has since moved onto a more "woman-celebrated answer" (Van Leeuwen *et al.* 1993: 59).

chapters in this study avoid this pitfall by utilising Braidotti's model, I would like to reiterate here that I believe feminism ought not to operate as yet another 'juridical system of power' (Butler 1990: 2) but instead we need to recognise that feminism "does not give us a stable ground"—there remains the necessity to waver "with our convictions" (Ahmed 2017: 7). Tong states of feminism's various 'labels', for example, that while they may ultimately be "entirely unreflective of feminism's intellectual and political commitments to women", they "signal…that feminism is not a monolithic ideology and that all feminism's do not think alike" (2009:1). In describing nomadic thought during an interview with Lisa Regan Braidotti recalls the words of Virginia Woolf "I am rooted but I flow" (Woolf in Braidotti & Regan 2017) stating that they encourage "us to recognise the intersections between mobility, multiple identities, and ethical belonging and accountability" (Braidotti in Braidotti & Regan 2017).

I am also aware that the 'feminist rhetoric' within the discourse of the movement, as highlighted in this study, is suspended within its Pentecostal framework, Pentecostal ideology being the demarcating parameters (its 'homeground') first and foremost. Here I would like to however point out that, more than theory, feminism is also a "life question" (Ahmed 2017: 2) where we learn to 'notice' injustice as a "form of political labour" (Ahmed 2017: 22, 32). Ahmed writes that often feminism begins with an impression that something is wrong, or someone has been wronged—"you sense an injustice" (2017: 22). For me, issues I address within this study started with such awareness rather than a 'seeking out' of certain issues to suit a specific theoretical framework.

That being said, this study does address the 'promises' made within the movement's own rhetoric that are in line with 'feminist' goals, as well as the way 'feminist themes' (such as iconic 'symbols' or 'catchphrases' that have arisen from the feminist movement) are appropriated. The question was whether the movement truly wishes to pursue similar aims. We see however, how, for example, diversity claimed in the rhetoric ('women from "all ages, nations and backgrounds") (manifesting in attendance), is undermined within the movement's discourse as well as its representations of femininity. I argue that, while cultural diversity is present (and women of colour occupy, at times, primary representational positions), femininity on a representational level mostly adheres to a very narrow standard depicting 'woman' as a cosmopolitan entity 'sanctified' from difference and 'illuminated' through those same devices that are so pervasive within the status quo (such as, for example, Western beauty standards and relentless focus on 'the body', adherence to fashion and consumerist trends). The notion of 'woman' is also polarised by situating some feminine subjects within the category of 'symbolic victim Other', while Sisterhood femininity suggests a kind of 'sovereignty' or 'Saviourhood'.

Similarly, the notion of 'giving ordinary women voice' appears to be more of a marketable catchphrase than a signifier for a true desire to create a platform where such voices can be heard. We see, for example, how the entire visual expression of the movement is reflective of the desires of its author, leaving very little possibility for 'lines of escape' to emerge. Space is only offered those voices that fall directly within a strictly demarcated territory and their purpose seems invariably to reiterate the significance of 'the One'.

The notion of 'women's mobilisation' within the movement, also, is one expounded through language and imagery that suggests revolutionary feminine (and thematically 'feminist') empowerment and activation. However, this radical character of its representations within its discourse translate only into 'faux empowerment': an empowerment that in fact does nothing more than reinstating the crippling traditional belief in 'female passivity'.

Femininity for the Colour Sisterhood appears to fall neatly into a space between gender complementarianism and its notion of 'flourishing'. It is interesting how these concepts work together to accommodate both traditional religious beliefs on women's pre-ordained role as secondary to man's as well as a fashionable (post-feminist) culture of hyper-consumerism and hyper-individualism. The movement's success arguably owes much to its ability to navigate the apparent 'dichotomy' between Christian fundamentalist principles and those trends happening in 'the world'. However, so much in terms of striving for positive change is sacrificed to this end. Also, because the movement is so adept at integrating visual styles and subjects that are 'in tune' with 'the times', its true discourse on women's position is easily masked by its imagery.

I would like to recall via Braidotti that dis-identification in the pursuit of transformative ethics involves pain (2008b: 9). Similarly, Ahmed writes that recognising 'what has not ended' is a "slow and painstaking step", often involving "you against a fantasy of equality" (2017: 5). While the Colour Sisterhood movement may be seen as a humanitarian movement (and even as such only to a certain degree), it falls short of initiating those painful transformations that would truly set it on the course to 'women's empowerment'. At the moment, the feminist language we encounter in its discourse—rather than being reflected as radical thought that flowers in its "habits of being" (hooks 1990: 25), can only be seen as self-serving, used as an economically or spiritually driven commodity. Without opening up its 'Centre', allowing it to crack or rupture, or extending lines of flight toward the unknown territories of the 'outside', the movement will continue to be caught up in a static 'non-place' between the residues of religious fundamentalism and the allurement of hyper-capitalism. At the time of writing, this 'place' did not offer what was necessary for the cultivation of truly transformative, inclusive subjectivity. Instead, it denied difference as well as women a position of

equality. If these characteristics remain, the movement would need to be wary that it does not become complicit to the very oppression it professes to condemn.

However, in ending, I need to reiterate that this thesis deals with 'representation' and is not able to measure how women may experience empowerment or disempowerment through the Colour Sisterhood on a personal level. Also, as briefly mentioned, this movement is, in many aspects, dynamic rather that static. For example, its visual material is regularly updated, and noticeable leaps have already been made in including representations of difference on some of its platforms, such as its South African Sisterhood webpage (2018-2019). Accessibility to the Sisterhood, albeit not its Colour Conference, seems to have increased recently through more events and gatherings for its members (although advertisements for these seem largely focused on reaching Hillsong members specifically). If the movement applies the same dynamic energy it so aptly does to its creative and marketing endeavours to an active questioning of its current ideologies, to searching out real conversations and to a joyful process of re-evaluation of its discourse on women's position, it may yet become a force for (true) change.

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